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SUPERMAN AND HIS INCREDIBLE FORTRESS OF SOLITUDE

ALL-NEW COLLECTOR'S EDITION!

SUPERMAN'S FIRST FORTRESS

By E. Nelson Bridwell

L-867

In this special publication we see the story of Superman's amazing Fortress of Solitude. But this sanctum never appeared until the June, 1958 issue of *ACTION COMICS* (#241)—twenty years to the month after the Man of Steel's debut in 1938.

True, there was a story in 1949 ("The Case of the Second Superman" in *SUPERMAN* #38) which showed a "Fortress of Solitude" in the Arctic, but it looked very different from the Fortress of today. It was clearly a building—a regular palace—as contrasted with the modern version, hewn out of solid rock. This story, therefore, must be relegated to the Superman Apochrypha—or to another Earth than the two we usually identify with Superman.

Or rather, with the Supermen. For, as most readers of DC know, there are two of them—the familiar one on Earth-One and his older look-alike on Earth-Two, in a parallel dimension. This is the Superman who began his career as an adult in the late 1930s, never having been Superboy, and who later (as Clark Kent) married Lois Lane and became editor of the Daily Star. The lives of this Clark/Superman and Lois are chronicled in the *Mr. and Mrs. Superman* series in *SUPERMAN FAMILY*.

The Earth-Two Superman has his secret hideaway—a mountain retreat in a remote area of some high mountain chain. Like the Earth-One Fortress, it, too, was hewn from solid rock by the fists of the Man of Tomorrow. But how different it looks!

The high, arched doorway is accessible only to Superman himself—or was until the Supergirl of that Earth, called Power Girl, made her appearance. (Of course, other flying heroes could undoubtedly reach it, though probably few could open it. Green Lantern's power ring and Doctor Fate's magic might give them the ability.)

Above the door is an "S" in the style of that on Superman's costume. He can, in an emergency, exit through this, though it may not allow one to enter the same way.

This retreat was completed in the story "Muscles for Sale" (SUPERMAN #17, July-August, 1942). Here he had a collection of trophies from his many adventures; a gymnasium specially equipped for his unique needs; a circular track for super-speed exercise; a library; and a laboratory. Additions were presumably made later.

It is a fact that Superman did not look quite so muscular in his earliest stories as later on. Doubtless his workouts with his special equipment helped to build his muscles.

There was one omission he could hardly help at this early period. Not a single memory of Krypton was found there—for Superman had never heard of his home planet!

The Earth-Two Man of Might came to Earth as a tiny baby, only a few weeks old. He was found by the Kents—John and Mary—and moments later, the rocket that brought him disintegrated. His adoptive parents never even knew what the object was, and Clark Kent grew up utterly ignorant of his origin. Having learned to walk on Earth, where the gravity was much lighter than that of Krypton, he only gradually discovered his powers. By the time he began his Superman career, he could leap an eighth of a mile, but had not yet flown. This power was to develop late, as were his vision abilities.

It was not until *SUPERMAN* #61 (Nov.-Dec., 1949) that he discovered his heritage. In "Superman Returns to Krypton," a petty crook and swindler named Dan Rivers, calling himself "Swami Riva," supposedly "hexed" Superman magically. The secret actually lay in the "jewel" in his turban—the first chunk of Kryptonite this Superman had ever encountered!

Having tracked the mineral to its source and learned it was probably meteoric in origin, Superman decided to find where it had ultimately come from, which involved breaking the time-barrier, a feat he had first accomplished some years earlier. Since he was now in a time when he existed elsewhere, and no one can be in two places at the same time, his physical body faded, and he became, through some dimensional shift, invisible and intangible. Moving back steadily through time, he traced the Kryptonite to the explosion of Krypton and beyond. He saw the planet with its mighty civilization. He found it easy to pick up the language, partly because of his super-brain, partly because he was able to tap vague memories of hearing it before, as an infant. But this only became certain when he saw Jor-L and followed him home to his wife, Lora.

Jor-L looked so like Superman—and tailing him enabled the Man of Steel to actually see himself rocketed to Earth as Krypton died! Now he learned how his real parents had saved him from death. As far as he knew, he was the only survivor. (Later, Power Girl disproved this supposition.) Recalling every feature of Jor-L and Lora, he carved statues of them in his mountain retreat. And he found means to learn much more of Krypton.

When he married Lois Lane, he decided the wedding with her as Clark was not enough. He took her to the mountain retreat, and there they exchanged bracelets as couples had done on Krypton. There was no Priest of Rao to officiate, so instead, the ceremony was carried out in the shadow of the statues of Jor-L and Lora.

SUPERMAN #81 showed Luthor finding the location of "Superman's Secret Workshop." And *WORLD'S FINEST* #69 had it revealed to the world.

I don't believe these stories happened—at least not on Earth-Two. I like to think Superman still maintains the secret of his mountain retreat, its location known only to him, Lois, and a few others, including Power Girl.

After all, that Superman is entitled to his hideaway, even as his Earth-One counterpart is. Doesn't everyone need a place to get away from it all?

That's why the modern Superman calls his retreat the Fortress of *Solitude!*

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ROCKETED AS A BABY FROM THE EXPLODING PLANET **KRYPTON**, **KAL-EL** CAME TO EARTH--WHOSE ENVIRONMENT GAVE HIM FANTASTIC POWERS! IN **METROPOLIS**, HE POSES AS **CLARK KENT**--BUT BATTLES **EVIL** THE WORLD OVER AS...

SUPERMAN

Created by JERRY SIEGEL & JOE SHUSTER

METROPOLIS! ONE OF THE LARGEST CITIES IN THE **UNITED STATES**--IN THE **WORLD!** IT ALWAYS CHOKES ME UP JUST TO **VIEW** IT FROM WAY UP HERE!

BUT IF I DON'T GET A **MOVE ON**, THERE'LL BE **NOTHING LEFT** OF IT IN A FEW MINUTES--NOTHING BUT A **CRATER** ROUGHLY THE SIZE OF **RHODE ISLAND!**

YET **TODAY**, THE MAN OF STEEL FACES THE **GREATEST CHALLENGE** OF HIS LONG AND TRIUMPH-STUDDED CAREER, AS HE CONFRONTS A **WORLD-SHATTERING TRAGEDY** WHOSE ULTIMATE ARCHITECT MAY HAVE BEEN --

HIMSELF!

FORTRESS OF FEAR!

FEATURING THE THOUSAND-AND-ONE STARTLING **SECRETS OF THE FORTRESS OF SOLITUDE!**

SSSS

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Hmmm... FUNNY THE THINGS THAT CROSS YOUR MIND, EVEN IN MOMENTS OF CRISIS!

RIGHT NOW, FOR INSTANCE, I KEEP REMEMBERING THAT "BATTLE-CRY" THE MEDIA PEOPLE MADE UP FOR ME--BUT WHICH I NEVER REALLY SAID, TILL THEY TOLD ME ABOUT IT.

COME TO THINK OF IT, THOUGH--THIS IS ONE TIME IT ACTUALLY FITS, SO--

UP--

UP--

--AND AWAY!

AWAY FROM *EARTH*, THAT IS--

--EVEN IF IT'S ONLY FOR A *FEW SHORT SECONDS*, AND FOR A MISSION THAT SHOULD BE *DUCK SOUP* FOR ME TO PERFORM!

STRANGE! I'LL PROBABLY BE BACK IN THE *DAILY PLANET BUILDING* EVEN BEFORE I'M MISSED, WITHOUT EVEN WORKING UP MUCH OF A *SWEAT.*

YET, IF I *WEREN'T* AROUND, *METROPOLIS'* TEEMING MILLIONS WOULD BE *DOOMED--*

--AND THE RESULTANT *EARTHQUAKES* AND *TIDAL WAVES* MIGHT EASILY KILL AND MAIM MORE PEOPLE THAN ALL OF *WORLD WAR TWO!*

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YET, IT ALL BEGAN SO *QUIETLY*, ONLY A FEW MINUTES AGO--

--WITH *FOUR PEOPLE* SITTING AROUND A *TV SCREEN* WATCHING A SHOW DEDICATED TO--

--*PEACE*!

YES, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, THAT IS THE VERY SPECIAL *THEME* OF TODAY'S VERY SPECIAL MEETING OF THE UNITED NATION'S *GENERAL ASSEMBLY* HERE IN NEW YORK CITY...!

AMAZING, ISN'T IT, PERRY? A FEW DECADES AGO, TELEVISION WAS ONLY AN AMUSING *NOVELTY*!

BUT TODAY'S TELECAST IS GOING OUT *LIVE* TO AN ESTIMATED *ONE BILLION PEOPLE*!

THEN LET'S HOPE IT *PROMOTES* SOME OF THAT *PEACE* SHE'S TALKING ABOUT!

LORD KNOWS, THE WORLD COULD *USE* SOME, RIGHT ABOUT NOW!

AND NOW, WE TAKE YOU *INSIDE* TO-- *SQUAWWKK!*

HEY! WHAT--?

SOMETHING'S HAPPENING TO THE *PICTURE*--

--AND, ASTONISHINGLY, NOT JUST IN *THIS* SET--BUT IN *TV* SETS ALL OVER THE *CITY*--

--CAN'T TELL *PERRY*, *LOIS*, AND *JIMMY* I CAN SEE THAT, OF COURSE!

CONFOUND THESE NEW-FANGLED--!

UH, I'M SURE IT'S JUST SOME MOMENTARY *INTERFERENCE* WITH THE *SATELLITE SIGNAL*, PERRY!

OH *YEAH*? SINCE WHEN DID *YOU* BECOME A *TV* REPAIRMAN, KENT? I--

HEY, CHIEF-- *LOOK*!

TH-THERE'S A *NEW* IMAGE FORMING!

AND IT'S DEFINITELY *NOT* BARBARA WALTERS!

GOOD AFTERNOON, MEN AND WOMEN OF EARTH!

ALLOW ME TO *INTRODUCE* MYSELF.

YOU MAY CALL ME-- *DOMINUS*!

UH OH! WHY AM I SO SURE THIS GUY SPELLS *TROUBLE*!?

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BECAUSE I HAVE PATCHED INTO THE U.S.A.'s **TELECOMMUNICATION'S NETWORK**, MY WORDS ARE BEING BEAMED TO THE **LARGEST AUDIENCE IN HISTORY**--WHICH IS ONLY **FITTING**.

FOR, EVERY **MAN, WOMAN,** AND **CHILD** ON EARTH WILL BE AFFECTED BY WHAT I AM ABOUT TO SAY--AND BY WHAT I HAVE **ALREADY DONE**--!

INCREDIBLE! HE'S MANAGED SOMEHOW TO ACHIEVE INSTANTANEOUS **TRANSLATION** OF HIS WORDS INTO LITERALLY **HUNDREDS** OF LANGUAGES--

--SO THAT **UNTOLD MILLIONS** WILL BE ABLE NOT ONLY TO HEAR--BUT TO **UNDERSTAND!**

AND WHAT **HAVE I** DONE, YOU MAY ASK?..

WHY, SIMPLY **THIS**:

BY **ELECTRO-MAGNETIC** MEANS, I HAVE PULLED A **COLOSSAL METEOR** IN FROM DEEP SPACE--AND GREATLY **ACCELERATED** ITS VELOCITY.

THUS, EVEN AS YOUR **ASTRONOMERS** ARE ONLY FIRST **OBSERVING IT**--IT IS ONLY **MINUTES** AWAY FROM STRIKING THE EASTERN **COAST** OF THE **UNITED STATES!**

G-GOOD LORD!

EXCUSE ME! I--I THINK I'M GOING TO BE **SICK!**

WHAT I WAS **REALLY** GOING TO BE, OF COURSE--WAS **SUPERMAN!!**

EVEN THOSE WHO MIGHT **REJOICE** AT A DISASTER BEFALLING AMERICA WOULD SOON THINK **TWICE**--WHEN THE **AFTERMATH** OF THE METEORITE'S IMPACT MIGHT MAKE THE VERY **ATMOSPHERE** OF THE ENTIRE EARTH **UNINHABITABLE!**

WELL, THERE IT **IS**--

--AND THE MYSTERIOUS "**DOMINUS**" SURE WASN'T KIDDING ABOUT ITS **SIZE** AND **MASS!**

STILL, MY **X-RAY VISION** DOESN'T DETECT ANY **KRYPTONITE** IN ITS MAKEUP...

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SO, NO MATTER *HOW* BIG--OR HOW *DENSE*-- I SHOULD STILL BE ABLE TO *TOTAL* IT BY HITTING IT *FULL-OUT!*

EITHER THAT, OR IT'LL TOTAL *ME*--AND EARTH CAN START LOOKING FOR A *NEW* CHAMPION OF TRUTH, JUSTICE, AND THE AMERICAN WAY!

WELL, NOBODY EVER *PROMISED* ME I WAS GOING TO LIVE *FOREVER!*

HERE GOES THE PROVERBIAL *NOTHING!*

YET, THE SCION OF STEEL IS NOT UNRUFFLED BY WHAT FOLLOWS...

HUH?? WHAT'S CAUSING THESE *SHOCK WAVES*-- WHEN THAT HUNK OF ROCK HAD VIRTUALLY *NO ATMOSPHERE?*

AND WHY SHOULD THEY *BOWL ME OVER* LIKE A COSTUMED *TENPIN?*

BUT--*WAIT* A MINUTE! THAT'S NOT *ALL!*--

THE *EARTH* I JUST SAVED-- IT LOOKS--*DIFFERENT*, SOMEHOW! CAN'T--QUITE--

THE EARTH'S *LAND-MASSES* ARE WHERE THEY SHOULD BE-- EXACTLY *ONE HOUR FROM NOW!*

THE *RESULT* OF THE COLLISION-IN-SPACE OF THESE TWO SEEMINGLY *ALL-BUT-IRRESISTABLE FORCES*, HOWEVER, IS *FAR* FROM NOTHING.

RATHER, THE AWESOME OUTCOME IS TRULY *SOMETHING*--

--NAMELY, A MIND-STAGGERING *EXPLOSION* HERE IN THE SOUNDLESS REACHES BEYOND EARTH'S STRATOSPHERE, AS *MAN* MEETS *METEOR* HEAD-ON!

AND IT IS THE *MAN* WHO WINS--

--BECAUSE HE IS *SUPERMAN!*

YES! NOW I SEE! THE *POSITION* OF THE *CONTINENTS*--IN RELATION TO WHERE THEY WERE JUST AN *INSTANT* BEFORE I STRUCK THE METEOR--

BUT, SINCE THAT'S *IMPOSSIBLE*--THEN IT MUST BE THAT THE *SHOCK OF COLLISION* KNOCKED ME EVER SO SLIGHTLY INTO THE *FUTURE*, SOMEHOW--SO THAT I'M SEEING THE EARTH AS IT *WILL BE*, PRECISELY *ONE HOUR* FROM--

GREAT KRYPTON! NOW WHAT??

THAT SUDDEN *FLASH OF LIGHT*--LIKE ANOTHER *EXPLOSION*--NEAR THE *NORTH POLE*--!

IT'S CAUSING TERRIFIC *REVERBERATIONS*--*GREAT CRACKS* IN THE VERY *EARTH* ITSELF!

I *KNOW* THOSE SIGNS! TH-THE EARTH IS ABOUT TO--

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--BLOW UP!

NO! IT CAN'T HAPPEN THAT WAY! I WON'T LET IT!

I LOST ONE HOMEWORLD THAT WAY--YEARS AGO--

--AND I WON'T ALLOW ANOTHER ONE TO--

EH?

IMAGES--GETTING BLURRY! NOW WHAT--?

HOLY HANNAH! NOW THE EARTH IS INTACT AGAIN--AND BACK WHERE IT WAS, A SPLIT SECOND BEFORE I STRUCK THE METEOR!

WHAT IN THE NAME OF SPACE-TIME CAUSALITIES IS GOING ON AROUND HERE?

I'D BETTER CHECK THE EARTH'S CORE, JUST TO MAKE SURE THAT--NOPE! NOTHING WRONG THERE!

NO FANTASTIC PRESSURES BUILDING UP THERE--SUCH AS CAUSED KRYPTON'S DEATH, WHEN I WAS AN INFANT!

BUT THAT DOESN'T EXACTLY GET ME OFF THE HOOK--

--BECAUSE I SAW THE EXACT SPOT WHERE THAT EARTH-EXPLOSION BEGAN--OR WILL BEGIN, IF I WASN'T SEEING THINGS--

--AND IT WAS TOO PINPOINT-PERFECT TO BE A MERE COINCIDENCE!

FOR AN INSTANT--A FEW SECONDS AT MOST--I WAS AN UNWILLING WITNESS TO THE FUTURE--

--AND IT WAS DEADLY--FOR MORE THAN FOUR BILLION PEOPLE!

GOT TO GET BACK TO EARTH FAST--FASTER THAN I'VE EVER MOVED BEFORE!

YES, THAT'S IT, SUPERMAN! SWOOP EARTHWARD AT THE SPEED OF SOUND--OF LIGHT--NAY, OF TIME ITSELF!

IN THE END, IT WILL AVAIL YOU NOTHING!

THE EARTH IS DOOMED!!

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THEN SUPERMAN *DID* GET A GLIMPSE OF THE *FUTURE*, DOMINUS--JUST LIKE YOU *WANTED* HIM TO!?

OF *COURSE*, MY DEAR ROGER! I DO *NOT* MAKE ERRORS IN *CALCULATION*.

FROM THE MOMENT I *LEARNED* OF THAT METEOR'S EXISTENCE, I KNEW FROM *SPECTRO-ANALYSIS*--

--THAT A *COLLISION* BETWEEN IT AND SUPERMAN'S *KRYPTONIAN FRAME* WOULD RESULT IN HIS BEING HURLED PRECISELY *ONE HOUR* INTO THE FUTURE!

YEAH--BUT IT WAS JUST FOR A *COUPLE'A SECONDS!*

HOW LONG DOES IT *TAKE*, FOOL, FOR ONE TO SEE THE *DREAMS OF A LIFETIME* GO UP IN *FIRE AND SMOKE?*

A FEW SECONDS WAS *QUITE* LONG ENOUGH TO MAKE THE MAN OF STEEL *STRIVE* MIGHTILY FOR THE NEXT SIXTY MINUTES TO *PREVENT* THAT HORRIFIC FUTURE!

LONG ENOUGH FOR HIM TO *SUFFER*--

--AND *LONG* ENOUGH, I AM CERTAIN--FOR HIM TO *FAIL!*

AS, AMID THE FREEZING COLD OF EARTH'S ARCTIC REGIONS...

THERE IT *IS*--THE VERY *SPOT* WHERE, IF MY VISION HOLDS TRUE, AN *EXPLOSION* WILL BEGIN THAT WILL TEAR THE WHOLE PLANET *ASUNDER*, LESS THAN AN HOUR FROM NOW!

FROM *ABOVE*--OR EVEN FROM *BELOW*--NO MORTAL EYE WOULD SEE ANYTHING BUT A MASSIVE *MOUNTAIN OF ICE*.

BUT MY *X-RAY VISION* REVEALS THAT PART OF THE *FACE* OF THAT MOUNTAIN IS MERELY AN *ILLUSION*, MASKING A HUGE *DOOR*--

--THE SECRET ENTRANCE-WAY TO MY OWN *FORTRESS OF SOLITUDE!*

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WHAT IRONY, IF MY SECRET CITADEL IS SOMEHOW CONNECTED WITH THE THREAT TO EARTH I FORESAW WHEN THAT METEOR EXPLODED!

FOR, IT WAS AS SUCH A METEOR THAT MY FIRST FORTRESS OF SOLITUDE WAS DISGUISED!

NOTHING CAN BEAT THIS FOR SHEER PRIVACY!

YET, I HAD SCARCELY LAUNCHED IT INTO ORBIT THAT DAY, YEARS AGO--*

*IN THE PAGES OF ACTION #261.--Len

"--WHEN SUDDENLY--"

WHAT--? SOME SORT OF SPACE-CLOUD APPROACHING -- AND IT SEEMS -- ALIVE!

YES, SUPERMAN! I AM URKO THE TERRIBLE--

--SWORN FOE OF ALL OTHER FORMS OF LIFE!

"THE MALEVOLENT INTELLIGENCE OF URKO NOT ONLY CAUSED THE WAX DUMMIES I HAD MADE OF MY EARTH-BORN FRIENDS TO COME TO LIFE--BUT ALSO ENDOWED THEM WITH SUPER-POWERS!..."

DEATH TO SUPERMAN!

DESTROY HIM!

"I WAS TOO INVULNERABLE TO DESTROY, HOWEVER--

"--SO THE LIVING SPACE-CLOUD TOOK ANOTHER TACK:

WE SHALL WAIT ONE HOUR, MY PETS--AND THEN WE SHALL DESTROY THE EARTH, INSTEAD!

WAIT AN HOUR!? URKO MUST NEED TIME TO COMPLETE HIS CONTROL OVER THE WAX IMAGES!

WELL, I'M NOT GOING TO GIVE IT TO HIM!

"DESPERATELY, WITH MY SUPER-BREATH, I PROPELLED A GIANT STAR TOWARD THE VAST ENTITY WHICH WAS URKO--

"--AND IT CONSUMED HIM!

NEVER AGAIN MUST I KEEP MY FORTRESS IN SPACE!

I CAN'T RISK RUNNING INTO OTHER UNKNOWN DANGERS SUCH AS URKO!

ALAS, THOUGH-- I STILL HADN'T LEARNED MY LESSON WELL ENOUGH.

NEXT, I TRANSPORTED THAT EARLIER, SMALLER FORTRESS INTO THE VERY CENTER OF THE EARTH--

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"I HAD HOPED TO FIND BOTH SAFETY AS WELL AS PEACE AND QUIET NEAR THE EARTH'S CORE, BUT INSTEAD--"

ATTACK! ATTACK!

DESTROY THE MONSTER!

GOOD GRIEF! I'M BEING ASSAULTED BY A RACE OF FIRE-PEOPLE!

THEY MUST THINK I'M SOME SORT OF INVADER COME TO HARM THEM.

"THEIR RECKLESSLY-HURLED FIRE-BOMBS, HOWEVER, HAD OPENED A FISSURE, THROUGH WHICH A GREAT UNDERGROUND RIVER RUSHED IN...

FLEE! IT IS HOPELESS! WE SHALL ALL DIE!

"FORTUNATELY FOR THEM, I WAS ABLE TO HOLLOW OUT A GREAT CANAL AT SUPER-SPEED...

"...INTO WHICH THE RAGING SUBTERRANEAN CATARACT WAS DIVERTED."

THERE! THAT SHOULD END THE MENACE TO THAT RACE OF... uh... HOT-HEADS!

"THE FIRE-PEOPLE REALIZED THEY HAD ERRED, AND TRIED TO PERSUADE ME TO STAY, BUT--"

SORRY, FOLKS! IT'S NOT THAT I MIND YOUR FIERY TEMPERS.

IT'S JUST THAT THE CENTER OF THE EARTH ISN'T AS PEACEFUL AS I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE!

"SOON AFTERWARD, I DECIDED UPON THE FAR ARCTIC AS THE BEST LOCATION FOR MY FORTRESS OF SOLITUDE...

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...THAT STRONGHOLD WHICH WAS TO BE MY *SECRET SANCTUM*... MY *HIDEAWAY*...

...THE ONE PLACE, PERHAPS, IN ALL THE *UNIVERSE*, WHERE I COULD COME TO STUDY... TO CONTEMPLATE... OR SIMPLY TO *RELAX*...

...TO SHUT OUT THE *WHOLE WORLD*, AND BE *ALONE*... AS EVERY MAN NEEDS TO BE, AT LEAST ONCE IN A WHILE!

RIGHT *NOW*, THOUGH, IT'S THE *FORTRESS* ITSELF THAT WILL GET MY UNDIVIDED ATTENTION!

I'LL JUST OPEN THE DOOR WITH THE *GIANT KEY* I'VE PLACED HERE, SO I CAN GO INSIDE AND START--

WAIT! WHY DO I ASSUME THAT THE *MENACE TO EARTH* MUST BE *INSIDE* THE FORTRESS?

WHY COULDN'T IT BE SOMETHING *RIGHT OUTSIDE* IT--LIKE THE *KEY* ITSELF?...

"*I* REMEMBER HOW, YEARS AGO, I FIRST *DISCOVERED* THIS DESOLATE SPOT--AND RETURNED LATER, TO TURN THAT DESOLATION TO MY *ADVANTAGE*..." *

THIS IS THE *IDEAL SPOT* FOR THE FORTRESS I HAVE IN MIND!

* *SEE SUPERMAN #176.* --LEN.

"USING MY BARE HANDS, I CARVED FROM *SOLID ROCK* THE REFUGE I YEARNED FOR...

THRAK

"...AS WELL AS THE MASSIVE *KEY* THERETO!"

NOBODY *ELSE* ON EARTH COULD UNLOCK THE PLACE, EVEN IF THEY STUMBLED ONTO IT!

BY DISGUISING THE KEY AS A HUGE *AIRPLANE MARKER*, INSTALLED ON A MOUNTAIN PEAK, IT WILL EVEN *GUIDE PILOTS* SAFELY THROUGH THIS ICY WILDERNESS.

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FOR, THE ALMOST-INDISPUTABLE *EVIDENCE* IS THAT SOMETHING *WITHIN* IT WILL CAUSE A *MIGHTY EXPLOSION* LESS THAN AN HOUR FROM NOW--

--AN EXPLOSION THAT WILL MEAN THE ***END OF THE WORLD!***

"LATER, I CREATED A *NEW METAL* SO TOUGH THAT EVEN **I** COULD PENETRATE IT ONLY WITH THE HELP OF AN *ULTRA-HARD DIAMOND.*

"TO TEST THE METAL, I PLOPPED A *MONOLITH* MADE OF IT DOWN IN THE MIDDLE OF *METROPOLIS PARK...*"

WHAT THE HECK *IS* THIS THING--AND HOW'D IT *GET* HERE?

I *DUNNO*-- BUT THE MAYOR WANTS IT *MOVED!*

*ACTION #409. --Len.

"...WHERE IT RESISTED THE BEST EFFORTS OF A SPECIAL *DEMOLITION SQUAD* TO DESTROY, DAMAGE, OR EVEN *DENT* IT.

ACID

"ONLY *CAPT. HORACE MITCHELL,* IN CHARGE OF THAT SQUAD, KNEW **I** HAD SECRETLY PLACED IT THERE IN THE NIGHT...

"...AND NOT EVEN *HE* HAD ANY IDEA *WHY!*

13

"FROM THAT DAY TO THIS, NO ONE ELSE HAS EVER KNOWN IT WAS I WHO REMOVED THE MONOLITH, AS WELL.

"REACHING THE NORTH POLE, I SOON EMPLOYED MY SPECIAL DIAMOND DRILL TO CUT OUT A LARGE KEYHOLE...

"AND MY HANDS TO SMOOTH OUT SAME...

"...AND THAT WAS THAT!

I'VE ALSO EQUIPPED THE KEYHOLE WITH ENOUGH PROTECTIVE DEVICES THAT NO ONE COULD SLIP THROUGH IT, EVEN AT SUPER-SPEED...

...AT LEAST, NOT WITHOUT SETTING OFF AN ULTRASONIC ALARM WHICH ONLY I COULD HEAR, WHEREVER I WAS.*

SO, SINCE I DIDN'T HEAR THE ALARM, I CAN ASSUME NOBODY'S BEEN INSIDE THE FORTRESS SINCE I WAS.

*ACTION COMICS #407.--Len

THERE! I'LL HANG THE KEY HERE, TILL I LEAVE.

I USED TO HANG IT UP RIGHT BESIDE THE DOOR OUTSIDE AS WELL...

...BUT I DECIDED I LIKED IT BETTER AS A MARKER!

Hmmm... I KNOW I DON'T DARE WASTE TIME ON TRIVIALITIES... AND YET, HOW CAN I TELL WHAT IS TRIVIAL, AND WHAT'S NOT?

ALL THE EVIDENCE POINTS TO THE FACT THAT SOMETHING IN MY CITADEL MAY CAUSE THE EARTH'S DESTRUCTION IN LESS THAN AN HOUR--AND RIGHT NOW, IT COULD BE ANYTHING, AS FAR AS I KNOW!

INCLUDING, NOW THAT I THINK OF IT-- ME!

GOT TO MAKE CERTAIN THAT I MYSELF DON'T BRING ANYTHING INTO THE FORTRESS WHICH COULD SOMEHOW CAUSE A FATAL CHAIN REACTION!

WELL, THIS SUPER-BLOWTORCH OF MINE SHOULD TAKE CARE OF ANY FATAL SPACE-DUST OR THE LIKE!

BESIDES, NOTHING LIKE A NICE HOT SHOWER ANYWAY!

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I'M NOT EVEN WASTING UNDUE *TIME*, SINCE I'M MOVING AT *SUPER-SPEED!*

EVEN WALKING THIS WAY, I'D BE NOTHING BUT A *RED-AND-BLUE BLUR* TO LOIS OR BATMAN, IF THEY WERE HERE NOW!

THUS, IT'S BEEN ONLY A *FEW SECONDS* SINCE I TOUCHED DOWN OUTSIDE--

YET HERE I *AM*, ALREADY AT MY *DIS-INTEGRATION PIT!*

"IT'S A SORT OF *ATOMIC CAULDRON*, REALLY... FUELED BY *RADIOACTIVE KRYPTONIAN ELEMENTS* I OBTAINED FROM THE BOTTLE-CITY OF *KANDOR*, LONG AGO.

"IT'LL *DISSOLVE* ALMOST ANYTHING WHICH IS DROPPED INTO IT BACK INTO ITS *MOLECULAR COMPONENTS* -- WITHIN AN *INSTANT*--

--AND THAT WOULD INCLUDE *YOURS TRULY*, IF I WERE FEELING *SUICIDAL*.

STILL, MY *X-RAY VISION* REVEALS NO HINT OF ANYTHING *WRONG*--EITHER HERE AT THE SURFACE *OR* AT PIT'S BOTTOM.

THERE ARE NO NATURAL FAULTS HEREABOUTS--AND I DON'T DETECT ANY *MAN-MADE* ONES, EITHER.

GOT TO *THINK*, THOUGH:

COULD THE DISINTEGRATION PIT, SOMEHOW, BE THE *EARTH-DESTROYING MENACE* I'M LOOKING FOR ??

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"I CAN'T SEE *HOW*--UNLESS IT GOT OUT OF *CONTROL*, SOMEHOW, AS HAPPENED ONLY *ONCE*--"*

CAREFUL, SUPERGIRL! WE PROMISED THE *U.N. DISARMAMENT COMMISSION* NOT TO LOSE A SINGLE ONE OF THESE *OUTLAWED WEAPONS!*

RIGHT YOU *ARE*, COUSIN KAL-EL!

ONE *SLIP*--AND THE WHOLE WORLD MIGHT BE *POLLUTED*--OR EVEN *OBLITERATED!*

*ACTION #402. --LEM

"SOON, IN THESE ROCKY DEPTHS BENEATH THE FORTRESS..."

FIRST I'LL DESTROY THIS "*JIGSAW-RAY*" *GUN*, WHICH CAN DISMANTLE A CITY IN SECONDS.

I'LL TOSS IN THIS EARTHQUAKE-CAUSING *SEISMOTRON*--

--OH YES, AND THIS *VAPOR BOMB* USED BY A DICTATOR TO *BRAINWASH* HIS SUBJECTS!

"THEN, EVEN AS WE FINISHED--"

HOLD IT, KARA! MY X-RAY VISION SHOWS YOU *HID* SOME KIND OF DEADLY *LASER PISTOL!*

OH!

AND HOW ABOUT THAT *CRYOGEN FREEZE-WAVE PROJECTOR* YOU SECRETED OVER *THERE*, YOU SUPER-RAT!

"SUDDENLY, AT THAT MOMENT, MY KRYPTONIAN COUSIN AND *I HATED* EACH OTHER WITH EVERY FIBRE OF OUR BEINGS..."

THIS IS WHERE YOU GET *YOURS*, YOU BENEDICT ARNOLD!

YOU *ASKED* FOR IT, YOU FEMALE JUDAS!

"IT WAS A WILDLY *IRRATIONAL* WAR WE FOUGHT...

"...IN WHICH *EACH* OF US ATTACKED ALSO THE THINGS THE OTHER ONE *LOVED*:"

THIS *TWIN-HEADED BIRD* SHE HAD BROUGHT FROM THE PLANET *DUPLOR*--

--WHERE *LIFE FORMS* MUTATED AND EVOLVED LIKE *SIAMESE TWINS!*

I WAS READY TO *SMASH* IT TO BITS IN ITS *CRYSTAL CAGE*--

--EVEN THOUGH TO DO SO WOULD BE TO BREAK MY CODE AGAINST *KILLING!*

16

"I HELD BACK FROM THAT ACT OF DESTRUCTION--BUT MOMENTS LATER, I MANAGED TO ENRAGE SUPERGIRL SO THAT SHE FLEW AT ME ABOVE THE ATOMIC CAULDRON, AND--"

I--I'M FALLING!! EYAHHHH!

HAH! YOU FORGOT TO STAY BEHIND THE PROTECTIVE RIM!

THE RADIOACTIVE KRYPTONIAN FUEL IN THAT FURNACE AFFECTS YOU ALMOST THE WAY ORDINARY RADIATION WOULD AFFECT A NORMAL EARTH-BEING!

"YET, EVEN AS KARA FACED CERTAIN DOOM, A DEEPER INSTINCT SURGED WITHIN ME..."

WH-WHAT AM I DOING??

I CAN'T STAND BY AND WATCH HER DIE!

MUCH AS I HATE HER--SHE IS MY OWN FLESH AND BLOOD!

"THEN, AFTER I'D RESCUED HER..."

I DON'T EXPECT ANY GRATITUDE! I DON'T KNOW WHY I DESPISE YOU SO, BUT--

WAIT! ALL OF A SUDDEN--I THINK I DO KNOW WHY WE HATE EACH OTHER!

QUICK! WE'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE!

"SHORTLY, IN THE OPEN AIR..."

WHY--I CAN FEEL THAT AWFUL HATRED LEAVING ME--BUT HOW--?

THIS BIRD, KARA! ORDINARILY, ITS TWO HEADS WORK AS A PERFECT TEAM!

I KNEW WHATEVER WAS AFFECTING US--

--MUST BE AFFECTING IT, AS WELL!

WE'D BEEN SO BUSY FIGHTING, WE HADN'T NOTICED THOSE FUMES PERMEATING THE FORTRESS.

THEY MUST BE FROM THE BRAINWASH BOMB WE TOSSED INTO THE DISINTEGRATION PIT BEFORE.

IT MUST HAVE CONTAINED A HATE GAS WHICH COMBINED WITH THE KRYPTONIAN ELEMENTS THERE--AND AFFECTED OUR MINDS!

BOY, DO I FEEL LIKE A FOOL!

DON'T WE BOTH!

BUT--WHAT ABOUT TODAY'S EVEN MORE DEVASTATING THREAT?

17

THE ENTIRE PLANET'S IN DANGER--MY FORTRESS OF SOLITUDE IS SOMEHOW RESPONSIBLE--YET I DON'T KNOW HOW!

I CAN'T EVEN DESTROY IT AS A PREVENTIVE MEASURE--BECAUSE I CAN'T BE SURE THAT WOULDN'T BE PRECISELY THE ACTION WHICH WOULD TRIGGER THE EXPLOSION!

YET, TO TAKE NO ACTION AT ALL--MAY BE EQUALLY FATAL!

GOT TO KEEP THINKING--PROBING--WORKING AGAINST THE CLOCK!

AH, CAN YOU ENVISION IT, DEAR ROGER?

CAN YOU SEE SUPERMAN IN YOUR MIND'S EYE, AS I CAN?

CAN YOU IMAGINE THE INNER AGONY HE MUST FEEL--FACING THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF CHANGING THE FUTURE?

I CAN'T--I DON'T DARE BELIEVE THAT THERE'S NO ANSWER TO THE DILEMMA POSED BY DOMINUS AND HIS STRANGE METEOR!

I REFUSE TO ADMIT THAT I'M DAMNED IF I DO--AND DAMNED IF I DON'T!

I HAVE TO BELIEVE I'M MASTER OF MY FATE--NOT ITS HELPLESS PAWN!

AND IF THERE IS AN ANSWER, THIS IS THE ONLY WAY I CAN HOPE TO FIND IT IN TIME--

--BY CONTINUING TO INVENTORY THE VARIOUS CHAMBERS OF MY FORTRESS--

--LOOKING FOR SOME CLUE--ANY CLUE--AS TO WHAT MIGHT CAUSE THE WHOLE PLACE TO EXPLODE IN LESS THAN AN HOUR!

AND THAT IS EXACTLY AS I WANTED IT TO BE!

NOT ONLY SHALL EARTH BE DESTROYED--BUT SUPERMAN WILL CONSIDER HIMSELF RESPONSIBLE FOR ITS ANNIHILATION!

UH--I NEVER ASKED BEFORE, DOMINUS--BUT WHAT ABOUT US WHEN THE EARTH'S GONE?

WOULDN'T IT BE BETTER TO CONQUER THE WORLD THAN TO DESTROY IT?

YOU THINK SMALL, ROGER... LIKE ALL LESSER MEN!

THERE ARE COUNTLESS EARTHS IN THE MULTIVERSE--PARALLEL WORLDS TO RAVAGE AND REND--ALMOST ALL OF THEM WITHOUT A "SUPERMAN"!

NOW YOU'RE TALKING!

BUT, BOY, I'LL BE GLAD WHEN THIS HOUR'S OVER--AND WE KNOW WE'VE WON!

OF COURSE WE'VE WON, FOOL! IT'S ONLY A MATTER OF TIME--

--ABOUT FIFTY MINUTES, TO BE MORE PRECISE!

PERHAPS IT'S SOMETHING HERE IN MY SUPER-WEAPONS ROOM, WHERE I STORE DEATH-DEVICES I'VE CONFISCATED FROM VILLAINS OF MANY A WORLD!

BUT I'VE CHECKED AND RE-CHECKED EACH OF THEM, MANY TIMES OVER, TO BE CERTAIN THEY'RE NON-OPERATIONAL!

BESIDES, THAT WOULD BE SO OBVIOUS--

--AND, TO THE EXTENT THAT I CAN GAUGE DOMINUS AT ALL, HE'S A MOST DEVIOUS OPPONENT!

19

EVEN MY ARCH-FOE LEX LUTHOR NEVER POSED ME ANY MORE MADDENING PROBLEM...

...AND I'VE FOUGHT HIM OFTEN ENOUGH TO GIVE HIM HIS OWN CHAMBER HERE!

EARTHQUAKE MAKER

MONEY MAGNET

ATOMIC DEATH RAY

LUTHOR

Hmmm... I JUST WONDERED--COULD HE BE MASQUERADING AS THE MYSTERIOUS "DOMINUS"?

BUT NO! IF HE WERE TRYING TO DESTROY THE EARTH--HE'D WANT EVERYONE TO KNOW IT WAS HE!

THE ANSWER MUST LIE ELSEWHERE...!

GOOD THING I'VE GOT AN "INTERNAL CLOCK" WHICH IS AS PRECISE AS AN ATOMIC TIME-PIECE... SO THAT I CAN KEEP SEARCHING FOR A SOLUTION, RIGHT UP TO THE LAST SECOND.

BUT, WHAT HAPPENS IF THAT FINAL MOMENT ARRIVES--AND I STILL HAVEN'T--?

NO! I WON'T CONSIDER THE POSSIBILITY OF FAILURE! I CAN'T!!

MAYBE THE ANSWER LIES HERE IN MY KRYPTONIAN MEMORIAL--PAST THESE STATUES OF MY PARENTS, JOR-EL AND LARA.

I CARVED THESE STATUES MYSELF--FROM MY OWN SUPER-MEMORY.

I CAPTURED THEIR IMAGES ALMOST PERFECTLY--DOWN PRACTICALLY TO THEIR FINGER-PRINTS!

SO WHY CAN'T I REMEMBER HOW I'VE BEEN CARELESS ENOUGH AT SOME TIME IN THE PAST TO LET A MAD SUPER-VILLAIN PLANT WHAT MAY BE A POWERFUL TIME-BOMB IN MY OWN SANCTUM SANCTORUM?

JOR-EL

LARA

20

I USED MY OWN MEMORY, TOO, TO ERECT THIS HUGE HOLO-SCREEN...

...WHEREIN A THREE-DIMENSIONAL IMAGE OF MY NATIVE WORLD IS ACTIVATED BY THE BODY HEAT OF ANY-ONE WHO STANDS NEAR IT!

OVER AND OVER AGAIN, IT REPRODUCES THE LAST MOMENTS OF KRYPTON'S EXISTENCE...

...THE INSTANT WHEN A ROCKET DESIGNED BY MY FATHER CARRIED ME EARTH-WARD...

...ONLY SECONDS BEFORE KRYPTON ITSELF WAS TORN APART BY UNBELIEVABLE INTERNAL PRESSURES!

I RE-CREATED THE SCENE BY OVER-TAKING THE VERY LIGHT RAYS WHICH HAD EMANATED FROM KRYPTON...

...AND I'VE ALMOST GOT TO THE POINT WHERE IT NO LONGER TORTURES ME TO LOOK AT IT!

AND NOW, THE RE-ENACTMENT BEGINS AGAIN... AS IT WILL DO SO LONG AS BOTH EARTH AND THIS FORTRESS STAND!

I HAD NO REAL TIES WITH KRYPTON OTHER THAN MY PARENTS, SINCE I WAS AN INFANT WHEN IT PERISHED!

BUT I HAVE FRIENDS HERE ON EARTH... A GREAT MANY FRIENDS... DEAR FRIENDS...

...AT THE DAILY PLANET ... AT GALAXY BROAD-CASTING... IN THE JUSTICE LEAGUE!

AND I DON'T KNOW IF I COULD BEAR THEIR LOSS, ON TOP OF THE DEATHS OF THE FACE-LESS BILLIONS.

I JUST... DON'T KNOW..!

BUT, THAT WAY LIES MADNESS... NOT ACTION!

IT'S THE LIVES OF PEOPLE LIKE LOIS LANE I'VE GOT TO THINK ABOUT... NOT THEIR DEATHS!

LOIS! IT SEEMS LIKE YESTER-DAY* THAT SHE FIRST CAME HERE, TO DO A PICTURE STORY ON THE FORTRESS...!

*ACTUALLY, IT WAS IN LOIS LANE #14. --Len

"I LEFT HER ALONE HERE IN THE KRYPTON EXHIBIT... WHICH RECREATES A TYPICAL KRYPTONIAN HOME, WITH EVERYTHING IN PERFECT WORKING ORDER...

SUPERMAN'S NOT BACK FROM METROPOLIS YET, AND IT'S BEDTIME!

GOOD! BY SPENDING A NIGHT HERE, I'LL PROVE TO HIM THIS WOULD BE A SAFE HOME FOR THE TWO OF US!

THEN HE WON'T HAVE ANY EXCUSE NOT TO MARRY ME!

THIS BED CERTAINLY IS-- OHH! WHAT KIND OF A COUCH IS THIS?

NOW I REMEMBER! SUPERMAN SAID IT WAS A FLOATING ANTI-GRAVITY BED--

--BUT IT SEEMS MORE LIKE A FLYING CARPET TO ME!

UH OH! NOW A GUST OF AIR IS BLOWING IT OUT OF THE KRYPTON EXHIBIT!

I'LL CRASH SOMEWHERE-- I JUST KNOW IT!

SUPERMAN-- WHERE ARE YOU WHEN I NEED YOU!?

OOOF! TALK ABOUT YOUR HOMEGROWN IRONIES!

THE COUCH BUMPED INTO THAT SUPERMAN-ROBOT HE LEFT ON GUARD!

WHIZZ...

I'M OKAY FOR NOW--BUT MAYBE THIS FORTRESS ISN'T QUITE AS SAFE FOR ME AS I THOUGHT IT WAS!

POOR LOIS! SHE DIDN'T REALIZE THAT "GUST OF WIND" WAS MY DOING -- TO DIS-COURAGE HER CHASING ME!

I DO CARE FOR HER, THOUGH-- FAR MORE THAN SHE KNOWS.

PERHAPS I COULD TAKE HER AND A HANDFUL OF OTHERS TO ANOTHER EARTH-LIKE PLANET--WHERE THEY'D SURVIVE, IF I FAILED TO--

NO! THAT KIND OF SOLUTION WORKED FOR MY FATHER, JOR-EL...

22

...BUT IT'S NO GOOD FOR ME!

EARTH IS MY ADOPTED PLANET...AND I'M AS MUCH A PART OF IT AS IF I'D BEEN BORN HERE.

MY PARENTS WOULD UNDERSTAND, I'M SURE, IF THEY WERE STILL ALIVE!

AFTER ALL, THEY ELECTED TO PERISH WITH THEIR OWN WORLD, RATHER THAN TRY TO FLEE IT.

I'VE ALWAYS BEEN PROUD OF HOW ITS MONITOR SCREENS ALERT ME TO EMERGENCIES THE WORLD OVER!

THERE ARE EVEN HYPERSPACE RADIOS WHICH KEEP ME IN TOUCH WITH DISTANT WORLDS!

Hmmm...NOT VERY LIKELY THAT WHATEVER BOOBY-TRAP DOMINUS HAS PLANTED IS HERE IN MY COMMUNICATIONS AREA, BUT I'D STILL BETTER CHECK IT OUT.

NOTHING TERRIBLY EXCITING GOING ON RIGHT NOW, THANK THE STARS... SINCE I SMASHED THAT METEOR.

ELSE, SOMEBODY WOULD COME ON TO--

--INTERRUPT THIS PROGRAM TO BRING YOU A SPECIAL NEWSBREAK BULLETIN!

UH-OH! NOW WHAT?

OH NO! IT CAN'T BE--!

HERE, LIVE BY HELICOPTER, IS THE FIRST FILM-FOOTAGE OF THE LONG-DORMANT VOLCANO KNOWN AS MT. HEPHAESTUS, WHICH HAS SUDDENLY ERUPTED--JUST AS MT. ST. HELEN'S DID IN THE STATE OF WASHINGTON, SOME MONTHS AGO...!

WHAT A TIME FOR THIS TO HAPPEN!

I MAY BE NEEDED TO HELP OUT--TO SAVE HUNDREDS, EVEN THOUSANDS OF HUMAN LIVES!

YET IF I DO--IT WOULD MEAN DELAYING MY SEARCH FOR THE TIME-BOMB THAT MIGHT COST FOUR BILLION LIVES!

23

FORTUNATELY, ALL INDICATIONS AT PRESENT ARE THAT THIS ERUPTION WILL BE **FAR LESS VIOLENT** THAN THE EARLIER ONE IN THE NORTHWEST.

AS OF THIS MOMENT, THERE ARE **NO** REPORTED DEATHS OR EVEN SERIOUS CASUALTIES... AND EVEN THE **VOLCANO** ITSELF SEEMS TO BE QUIETING DOWN...!

GOOD! THEN I WON'T BE NEEDED FOR THE NEXT HOUR, AND I CAN CONTINUE MY *SUPER-SEARCH!*

PRESUMPTUOUS OF ME, ANYWAY, TO THINK THAT PEOPLE CAN'T HANDLE MOST DISASTERS WITHOUT A *SUPERMAN* TO HOLD THEIR HANDS!

THEN, AS THE MAN OF STEEL EXITS FROM THE COMMUNCATIONS AREA, HE SUDDENLY NOTICES...

THOSE *GAS-JETS!* I'D FORGOTTEN ALL **ABOUT** THEM!

I'D BETTER MAKE SURE THEY'RE STILL *FUNCTIONING* PROPERLY!

YEP, THEY'RE IN *WORKING ORDER*, ALL RIGHT...

...AND THE *GAS* THEY'RE DUE TO RELEASE IN A *HALF HOUR* WILL SURELY KILL ANY MICROBES I MIGHT HAVE CARRIED BACK TO EARTH FROM THAT *METEOR!*

BESIDES, IT WAS AN *EXPLOSION* I SAW DOOMING THE EARTH--NOT SOME KIND OF *GERM WARFARE!*

I DESIGNED THEM TO RELEASE *ANTI-BACTERIAL* GAS ONCE A MONTH--

--TO DESTROY ANY DEADLY *ALIEN MICROBES* I MIGHT BRING BACK WITH ME FROM AN ADVENTURE IN *OUTER SPACE.*

24

IT DOESN'T TAKE *LONG*, EITHER, FOR MY X-RAY VISION TO PROBE ALL THE ARTIFACTS IN MY SIZABLE *TROPHY ROOM*.

I GOT THE IDEA FROM THE *BATMAN*-- THOUGH IN MY OWN WAY, I'M A COLLECTOR ON AN EVEN *BIGGER SCALE* THAN HE IS!

GOT TO *REMEMBER*, THOUGH, TO GET RID OF THAT *EXACT REPLICA* OF BATMAN'S FAMOUS *MECHANICAL DINOSAUR!*

I NEEDED IT FOR A PARTICULAR *CASE*... BUT NOW IT'S JUST *TAKING UP ROOM!*

HERE'S *ONE* TROPHY THAT REMINDS ME OF A BUNCH OF CRIMINALS WHO *PHYSICALLY* INVADED MY FORTRESS, SOME TIME BACK.

I MADE THE CAGE AS A *GAG*, ORIGINALLY... SINCE, OF COURSE, THERE'S *NO SUCH THING* AS A "VENUSIAN LIZARD-DOG."

RESERVED FOR VENUSIAN LIZARD-DOG

BUT WHAT HAPPENED TO *ME* IN CONNECTION WITH IT WAS *NO* LAUGHING MATTER...!

25

"A HOODLUM NAMED 'KING' ANDREWS HAD LEARNED MY CITADEL'S LOCATION WHEN HE'D CRASHED NEARBY-- AND SEEN ME RUSHING OUT TO RESCUE HIM.*

"LATER, WITH HIS SON MICHAEL AND A MYSTERIOUS ELECTRONICS EXPERT NAMED SLESAR, HE CAPTURED CLARK KENT AS A POSSIBLE HOSTAGE, AND...

GENTLEMEN--SUPERMAN'S FORTRESS OF SOLITUDE!

YOU DID IT, DAD!

"I COULDN'T ACT WITHOUT EXPOSING MY SECRET IDENTITY, BUT I FIGURED THEY'D NEVER MAKE IT PAST THE DOOR.

* SEE ACTION #407. --Len

"I'D RECKONED WITHOUT THE ONE CALLED SLESAR..."

THERE! I'VE DEACTIVATED HIS PROTECTIVE DEVICES, ELECTRONICALLY!

"SOON, INSIDE..."

GOOD WORK, SLESAR! MIKE--YOU GUARD KENT! HE'S OUR ONLY TICKET OUT OF HERE IF SUPERMAN SHOWS UP!

KEEP HIM IN THAT EMPTY CAGE WHILE ME AND SLESAR LOOK FOR GOODIES TO LOOT!

RESERVED FOR VENUSIAN LIZARDIDS

"MINUTES LATER..."

MY DISASTER MONITOR'S PICKING UP AN SOS FROM THE SAHARA!

GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE!

MIKE! LEAVE KENT AND COME HERE! I NEED YOU!

COMING, DAD!

MY SUPER-VENTRILOQUISM STUNT WILL GIVE ME ABOUT TEN SECONDS...

...WHICH I JUST PRAY IS ENOUGH TO SAVE BOTH THOSE SAHARAN OIL-RIGGERS BELOW--AND MY SECRET IDENTITY!

MOST OF THAT OIL DERRICK'S BEEN EATEN AWAY BY SOME SORT OF SUPER-POTENT ACID-- THE RESULT OF POLLUTION WHICH WORKED ITSELF UNDERGROUND!

I CAN'T LET IT SPREAD!

26

MY SUPER-SPEED WHIPS UP A TORNADO OF SAND, SURROUNDING THE GUSHING FLOW OF ACID.

NEXT, I'LL USE MY HEAT VISION TO FUSE THE SAND PARTICLES TOGETHER TO FORM A SUPER-HARD COCOON OF SILICON...

...AND I'LL CIRCULATE THE DEADLY ACID RIGHT BACK INTO THE UNDERGROUND POOL IT CAME FROM!

"THIS DONE, I GOT BACK JUST IN TIME..."

STILL THERE, HUH, KENT?

RESERVED FOR VENUSIAN LIZARD-DOG

FROM NOW ON, I'M NOT BUDGING!

"I'D HOPED FOR NO MORE CRISES, BUT--"

NOT AGAIN! AN EMERGENCY IN FLORIDA THIS TIME!

THIS CALLS FOR A MORE DRASTIC PLOY!

MIKE HEARS NOTHING-- BUT THIS IS AN ULTRA-SONIC WHISTLE...

...SO INTENSE, IT SETS UP SHARP VIBRATIONS IN THE CEILING ABOVE, THAT SHOULD CAUSE A--

--MASSIVE CAVE-IN!

TH-THE WHOLE CEILING'S COMING DOWN!

"THEN, AFTER TONS OF ROCK AND DEBRIS HAD SETTLED..."

MR. KENT! ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

SAY SOMETHING!!

"HE THOUGHT I HAD DIED IN THE CAVE-IN... OR ELSE WOULD SWIFTLY SUFFOCATE...

"BUT OF COURSE, I WAS NO LONGER INSIDE THE RUBBLE...

"...BUT RATHER, THOUSANDS OF MILES AWAY, ALREADY PLUNGING INTO THE DEPTHS OF THE ATLANTIC...!"

A DISABLED POLARIS SUB SENT THAT SOS BECAUSE IT WAS SNAGGED BY SOME KIND OF MONSTROUS SEAWEED.

WELL, AQUAMAN HIMSELF COULDN'T MAKE BETTER USE OF THIS PAIR OF SWORDFISH TO CUT THEM LOOSE!

27

"MEANWHILE, THE THREE *INTRUDERS* WERE SHOWING THEIR *TRUE COLORS*..."

BUT, DAD-- WE CAN'T LEAVE MR. KENT IN THERE-- HE'LL RUN OUT OF *AIR!*

LET HIM! WE DON'T *NEED* HIM ANY MORE!

I WAS GOING TO *KILL* HIM, ANYWAY!

JUST AS *I'M* GOING TO KILL BOTH OF *YOU!*

SLESAR! WHAT THE DEVIL DO YOU THINK YOU ARE *DOING!?*

NOT "*SLESAR*," YOU FOOL--

--BUT *LEX LUTHOR!*

SUPERMAN'S NUMBER ONE ARCH-ENEMY!

I KNEW YOU'D NEVER HAVE TAKEN *ME* INTO THE FORTRESS-- SO I HAD TO BECOME "*SLESAR.*"

BUT *I* WASN'T IN IT FOR THE *MONEY!*

NO, WHILE *YOU* WERE BUSY COLLECTING SPACE-JEWELS AND TRINKETS, I METICULOUSLY PLANTED A DEADLY *BOMB* WHERE SUPERMAN HIMSELF IS SURE TO *SET IT OFF!*

MORE THAN *ANYTHING ELSE* IN THE WORLD, I WANTED HIM AND HIS FORTRESS *ANNIHILATED!*

I PLAN TO BE *LONG GONE* BEFORE THE *BIG BANG*-- BUT FIRST I MUST *SILENCE* BOTH OF YOU!

NOBODY DOUBLE-CROSSES KING ANDREWS-- NOT EVEN *LUTHOR!* I--

DAD!

AARRRRH!

"KING ANDREWS WAS *DEAD*-- AND HIS SON MICHAEL WAS *NEXT* ON LUTHOR'S LIST--

"-- WHEN *I* ARRIVED JUST IN TIME TO *TEAR UP* THAT LIST!"

SUPERMAN!

WHO *ELSE?*

AND RIGHT ON *TIME*, TOO!

UHHHH

"THEN, AS NOW, I BEGAN A FRANTIC, SUPER-FAST SEARCH FOR A DEADLY TIME-BOMB.

"ONLY THING IS, THAT TIME I KNEW I WAS DEFINITELY LOOKING FOR SUCH A BOMB..."

THE SOUND OF A DETONATOR TICKING--INSIDE MY KEYHOLE!

TICKING--AND BEING ACTIVATED BY MY VERY PRESENCE!

"...AND SO I FOUND IT.

"INSTANTLY, I EXHALED A SUPER-COMPRESSED BURST OF AIR...

"...SO FORCEFUL THAT IT SENT THE BOMB HURTLING UPWARD THROUGH THE ARCTIC AIR..."

LESS THAN HALF A SECOND HAS ELAPSED SINCE THE DETONATOR CLICKED!

"...TO EXPLODE IN OUTER SPACE!"

WOW! THAT BLAST WAS CREATED BY ANTI-MATTER FUSION... WHICH WOULD'VE OBLITERATED EVEN ME!

YOU WOULD HAVE LET THE BOMB EXPLODE HERE--AND SACRIFICED EVEN YOUR OWN LIFE--JUST AS LONG AS I DIED, TOO!

LUTHOR, DO YOU REALLY HATE ME THAT MUCH?

YOU ALREADY KNOW THE ANSWER TO THAT, SUPERMAN!

"INDEED I DID...TO MY ETERNAL SORROW.

"SOON, AFTER GIVING KING ANDREWS A PROPER BURIAL..."

SUPERMAN! I JUST REALIZED--WE FORGOT MR. KENT!

DON'T WORRY, MIKE!

RESERVED FOR VENUSIAN LIZARD-DOG

er... AFTER THE CAVE-IN, I HAD ENOUGH TIME TO TUNNEL HIM OUT OF THE CAGE, AND AWAY TO SAFETY!

THAT WAS BY FAR THE CLOSEST CALL EITHER I OR THE FORTRESS OF SOLITUDE HAS EVER HAD.

KING ANDREWS

NOW, HOWEVER, ALL THAT REMAINS OF THAT "INVASION" IS A GRAVESTONE OUTSIDE...

...AND NO MAN KNOWS JUST WHERE IT LIES!

RESERVED FOR VENUSIAN LIZARD-DOG

AND, LUTHOR'S IN *PRISON*-- I MADE SURE OF THAT WITH MY *X-RAY VISION* ON THE WAY BACK HERE--

--WHILE THE *MENACE* POSED TO THE EARTH WAS OBVIOUSLY PLANNED AND EXECUTED BY SOME-ONE VERY MUCH *AT LARGE!*

WELL, JUST *ONE* PLACE LEFT ON THIS *FIRST LEVEL* TO CHECK OUT...

...NAMELY, THE SPECIAL *MODULAR APARTMENT* I BUILT ONTO THE FORTRESS FOR MY COUSIN, *KARA*...

...A.K.A. *SUPERGIRL!*

I DON'T LIKE INVADING HER *PRIVACY* WHILE SHE'S NOT HERE-- BUT THIS IS AN *EMERGENCY!*

"BESIDES, SHE GAVE ME *PERMISSION* TO ENTER HER ROOMS-- AFTER OUR FUME-INDUCED LITTLE *SUPER-FEUD* ENDED--

I SURE DON'T NEED THIS *DOOR* ANY MORE!

IT'S *ONE* FORTRESS FOR *BOTH* OF US-- SHARE AND SHARE ALIKE!

"*SUPERGIRL*"! IT'S A NAME THAT'S BEEN GOOD ENOUGH, THESE PAST SEVERAL YEARS SINCE SHE ARRIVED FROM A LAST SURVIVING FRAGMENT OF *KRYPTON*--

BUT ONE OF THESE FINE DAYS, IT'S GOING TO HAVE TO BE *CHANGED*-- TO *SUPERWOMAN!*

HOW COULD I *EVER* FORGET THE LONG MONTHS I SPENT *TRAINING* HER FOR LIFE ON EARTH--

"--OR THE ALMOST-PATERNAL *PRIDE* I FELT THAT DAY WHEN IT WAS *I*, NOT *DOMINUS*, WHO INTERRUPTED *ALL TELECASTS* ON THE PLANET TO ANNOUNCE:"

FOR SOME TIME NOW, I'VE BEEN AIDED SECRETLY BY MY "EMERGENCY SECRET WEAPON"...

AND HERE SHE IS... MY LOVELY, SUPER-POWERFUL COUSIN, *SUPERGIRL!*

HELLO, EVERYBODY!

30

BUT--CAN'T LET MYSELF *WAX NOSTALGIC* ABOUT COUSIN KARA.

TIME'S RUNNING OUT, AND I'VE ONLY EXAMINED THE *FIRST LEVEL* OF THE FORTRESS!

MAYBE THE *ANSWER* I'M LOOKING FOR--THE ANSWER I *MUST FIND*--IS UP HERE ON THE *SECOND!*

I'LL START WITH MY *LAB*, EVEN THOUGH EVERYTHING HERE HAS BEEN CHECKED OUT *MANY* TIMES, TO BE CERTAIN IT POSES NO DANGER.

FUNNY HOW, EVERY TIME I COME HERE, I STILL EXPECT TO SEE THE *BOTTLE-CITY OF KANDOR...*

...RESTING ON THIS *PEDESTAL* WHERE IT SAT FOR YEARS...

"I GUESS I SHOULD BE *GRATEFUL* THAT THE MAD, HUMANOID SUPER-COMPUTER CALLED *BRAINIAC* WAS THEN JOURNEYING THROUGH SPACE, '*COLLECTING*' CITIES OF VARIOUS PLANETS BY FIRST *SHRINKING THEM DOWN.*

"ONE OF THE CITIES HE CHOSE TO 'COLLECT' WAS *METROPOLIS*--AND I MADE SURE *CLARK KENT* WAS THERE AT THE TIME.

"I'M EVEN *LUCKIER* THAT HE DECIDED TO MINIATURIZE AND STEAL A DOZEN GREAT *EARTH-CITIES*, AS WELL, TO ADD TO HIS BIZARRE COLLECTION.

"AFTER THE MADMAN HAD *SHRUNK* METROPOLIS AND PLACED IT IN A BOTTLE, I WAS ABLE TO *FLY OUT...*"

NOW TO REPLACE THE CORK, SO BRAINIAC DOESN'T NOTICE--AND SUSPECT I'M NOW *INSIDE* HIS SHIP!

31

THIS IS HIS HYPER-FORCE MACHINE!

GOT TO STUDY IT CAREFULLY-- FIGURE OUT A WAY TO MAKE IT RETURN THOSE CITIES TO EARTH!

"UNFORTUNATELY, BRAINIAC HAD AN ALIEN PET ALONG FOR COMPANY, AND..."

I HAVEN'T LOOKED AT MY PRIZE CITY FOR AWHILE.

THAT BUZZING FLY ANNOYS ME! SWAT HIM, KOKO!

GOOD THING BRAINIAC DIDN'T LOOK CLOSELY AT THIS "FLY"!

I'LL HIDE IN THIS BOTTLE HE JUST UNCORKED--TILL HIS PET PUTS AWAY THAT SWATTER!

G-GREAT STARS! THAT'S A CITY OF KRYPTON-- MY HOME PLANET!

BRAINIAC MUST HAVE IMPRISONED IT INSIDE HIS BOTTLE YEARS BEFORE KRYPTON EXPLODED, SO THAT--

OOOF! I CAN'T FLY IN HERE! OF COURSE!

KRYPTON'S GRAVITY CONDITIONS ARE DUPLICATED HERE-- SO I HAVE NO SUPER-POWERS AS I DO ON EARTH!

"REGAINING MY COMPOSURE, I SOUGHT OUT A KRYPTONIAN SCIENTIST FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MY LIFE..."

--AND MY FATHER WAS JOR-EL, THE FAMOUS SCIENTIST!

I KNEW HIM WELL! I'M PROFESSOR KIMDA-- AND THIS IS KANDOR, THE CITY WHICH WAS ONCE KRYPTON'S CAPITAL.

"PROFESSOR KIMDA, IT SEEMS, HAD USED HIS TELESCOPE TO STUDY BRAINIAC'S CONTROL DEVICE..."

NORMALIZING HYPER-FORCE

BOTTLE #1
BOTTLE #2
BOTTLE #3
BOTTLE #4

I'M MADE A CHART OF THE BUTTONS THAT CAN RESTORE THE MINIATURE CITIES TO EARTH!

"SOON AFTERWARD, BRAINIAC DECIDED TO GO HOME-- SO HE PUT HIMSELF AND HIS PET INTO SUSPENDED ANIMATION...

"...HIS MOST PRECIOUS BOTTLE-CITY BY HIS SIDE.

"THIS WAS OUR *CHANCE!* I COULDN'T *FLY* AS LONG AS I STAYED IN THE BOTTLE-CITY...

"...BUT KIMDA PROVIDED ME WITH A POWERFUL *ROCKET* WHICH GOT ME UP TO ITS *METAL CORK.*

"AND I'D BROUGHT ALONG A *METAL-EATING MOLE* FROM KANDOR'S ZOO..."

HE'LL BURROW A *TUNNEL* BIG ENOUGH FOR ME TO *CLIMB* THROUGH.

NOW THAT I'M OUT-SIDE, I'M *FREE* OF THE KRYPTONIAN GRAVITY WITHIN!

I CAN FLY TO BRAINIAC'S *CONTROL* PANEL--

--AND EACH *BUTTON* I PRESS WILL MAKE A *CITY* REAPPEAR BACK ON EARTH, UNHARMED, AT *NORMAL SIZE!*

"THEN, SUDDENLY--A *DILEMMA--!*"

TRANSMITTING THE EARTH-CITIES BACK HAS *DRAINED* THE BATTERIES OF THEIR COSMIC POWER.

ONLY ONE *CHARGE* OF HYPER-FORCE LEFT--

ENOUGH TO RESTORE *KANDOR* TO NORMAL SIZE OR *ME*--BUT NOT *BOTH!*

WELL, I'M ONLY *ONE MAN!* THE HYPER-RAY CAN SAVE A *MILLION* PEOPLE IN THE KRYPTONIAN CITY--ALLOWING THEM TO LIVE ON *EARTH.*

I'LL PRESS THE BUTTON THAT WILL *LIBERATE* THEM...!

"BEFORE I COULD REACH THE BUTTON, HOWEVER..."

WHAT? THAT TINY ROCKET "*PUNCHED*" THE BUTTON AHEAD OF ME--AND THE RAY STRUCK *ME!*

I'M REGAINING *NORMAL SIZE* SWIFTLY!

IT'S *I*--*KIMDA!* I FLEW THE ROCKET OUT OF THE HOLE IN THE CORK TO PUNCH THE BUTTON, *KNOWING* THAT ONLY ONE CHARGE WOULD BE LEFT!

WE OF KANDOR COULD NOT LET THE EARTH--*NAY,* THE *UNIVERSE*--BE DEPRIVED OF ITS GREATEST *HERO!*

YOU *SACRIFICED* YOUR PEOPLE--FOR *ME!*

I'M GRATEFUL--BUT NOW *YOUR* CITY MUST REMAIN FOREVER *TINY!*

33

LET BRAINIAC'S SHIP FLY ON!

WHEN HE AWAKENS, HE'LL HAVE NO STOLEN CITIES!

"AND SOON, BACK HERE IN MY FORTRESS..."

THE MINIATURE KRYPTONIAN CITY WILL KEEP SAFELY HERE.

PERHAPS I'LL FIND A WAY TO RESTORE IT TO NORMAL SIZE ONE DAY--AND LIVE WITH MY OWN PEOPLE AGAIN.

SOMEDAY! WHO KNOWS..?

AND, AMAZINGLY, THAT "SOMEDAY" DID COME TO PASS!*

MONTHS AGO, I FOUND A WAY TO ENLARGE THE KANDORIANS AND THEIR CITY AGAIN--ON A LARGE PRIMITIVE PLANET ORBITING A RED SUN SUCH AS KRYPTON ITSELF ONCE CIRCLED.

UNKNOWN TO ME, THEY HAD DELIBERATELY CHOSEN A PHASE-WORLD, ONE WHICH TRULY EXISTS ONLY IN ANOTHER DIMENSION...

...AND WHICH ONLY APPEARS IN THIS DIMENSION DURING A SHIFT IN THE COSMIC AXIS.

BUT WHENEVER IT DOES POP UP, I'LL BE RIGHT THERE WAITING TO PAY NEW KANDOR A VISIT--

--PROVIDING I'M STILL ALIVE!

* SEE SUPERMAN #338. --LEN.

NO! I DON'T DARE CONSIDER THAT POSSIBILITY--BECAUSE IF I'M DEAD LESS THAN A HALF-HOUR FROM NOW, THAT MEANS THE EARTH WILL BE, TOO!

NEXT STOP--MY KRYPTONITE STORAGE ROOM!

ANTI-KRYPTONITE SUIT

IT'S NOT LIKELY THE MENACE WILL APPEAR HERE, THOUGH--SINCE KRYPTONITE'S ONLY A THREAT TO SUPERGIRL AND ME, NOT TO THE WHOLE PLANET!

AND MY ANTI-KRYPTONITE SUIT* SHOULD PROTECT ME, EVEN IF THIS SPECIAL GLASS SHOULD SHATTER!

*SEE ACTION #241 --Len

NOTHING SEEMS OUT OF ORDER IN MY ROBOT STORAGE ROOM, EITHER!

I TRY TO KEEP UP TO DATE ON THE LATEST IN ROBOTICS--

--EVEN THOUGH KARA AND I RARELY USE OUR ROBOT DOUBLES THESE DAYS!

IT ONLY TAKES ME A FEW SECONDS TO CHECK MY SUPER-COMPUTER ROOM, AS WELL--AND EVERYTHING SEEMS SHIPSHAPE!

HANDY LITTLE THING! IN ADDITION TO STORING MORE INFORMATION THAN ANY OTHER COMPUTER ON EARTH--

--IT'S CONNECTED TO ARCHIVES WHICH INCLUDE PERHAPS THE LARGEST CRIME FILE ON EARTH.

I USE THE OTHER HALF OF MY ROOM FOR MY PHANTOM ZONE VIEWER.

MAYBE I'D BETTER CHECK IN ON THAT DIMENSION'S UNWILLING GUESTS...

...JUST TO BE CERTAIN ONE OF THEM HASN'T ESCAPED SOMEHOW, AND BECOME DOMINUS.

NOPE, LOOKS LIKE THEY'RE ALL ACCOUNTED FOR--SOME OF THE MOST DANGEROUS CRIMINALS FROM DEAD KRYPTON OR ANYPLACE ELSE IN THE KNOWN UNIVERSE!

THERE'S MON-EL, TOO--REALLY LAR GAND OF THE PLANET DAXAM--WHOM I ONCE THOUGHT WAS MY LONG-LOST BROTHER!

HE DOESN'T BELONG IN THERE WITH THOSE OTHER DO-BADDERS... AND I'LL NEVER GIVE UP TRYING TO FIND A WAY TO FREE HIM FROM THE PHANTOM ZONE...

...BUT I CAN'T WORRY ABOUT THAT NOW!*

*MON-EL WAS FINALLY FREED--IN THE 30TH CENTURY--BY THE FAMED LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES. --Len

35

TIME'S RUNNING OUT--AND I STILL SEEM AS MUCH IN THE DARK AS EVER!

I'M ALMOST TEMPTED TO SKIP TAKING A MAGICAL MYSTERY TOUR OF MY ALIEN ZOO!

BUT I DON'T DARE RISK OVERLOOKING A CLUE--NO MATTER HOW SMALL!

THESE TWO EXHIBITS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN MY FAVORITES: A GIANT INSECT AND THOSE MINI-DINOSAURS!..

...FROM A WORLD WHERE EVOLUTION WORKED A WEE BIT DIFFERENTLY THAN ON EARTH.

I'VE ALWAYS HAD A SOFT SPOT FOR THIS DANCING PLANT, TOO!

I FOUND IT ON MARS--BUT IT REALLY CAME FROM A SPORE THAT HAD DRIFTED THERE FROM ANOTHER GALAXY!

IT'S GOOD COMPANY, THOUGH...

...FOR THIS "VENUS BUTTERFLY," AS I CALL IT, WHICH SINGS LIKE A CANARY!

IT MAY BE THE APHRODITE OF INSECTS--BUT ITS REAL HOME WAS ON A PLANET OF THE STAR BETELGEUSE!

THIS ONE, I'LL ADMIT, I'D JUST AS SOON DONATE ELSEWHERE:

I CALL IT THE BRAVADO-BEAST, BECAUSE IT HATES THE COLOR YELLOW!

THE MERE SIGHT OF MY BELT OR EMBLEM ALWAYS SENDS IT INTO A RAGE.

"LOIS ONCE THOUGHT ME A COWARD BECAUSE I HID BEHIND HER WHEN IT CHARGED ME*...

"BUT IT CALMED DOWN, WHEN IT DIDN'T SEE YELLOW."

*LOIS LANE #14. --Jon

IT'S REALLY EVEN LESS DANGEROUS THAN MOST OF THE OTHER CREATURES, THOUGH...

...INCLUDING THIS ONE, WHICH IS CONSTANTLY BEING FOOLED BY ITS OWN REFLECTION.

I'D NEVER PART WITH THIS PAIR OF *METAL-EATERS*, THOUGH... IF ONLY BECAUSE *KRYPTONITE* IS A RARE *DELICACY* TO THEM!

FURRED FROG... BEAKED CAT... ANIMAL PLANT... I'VE HAD TO MAKE CERTAIN ALL OF THEM WERE *GERM-FREE*, IN CASE THEY EVER GOT LOOSE HERE ON EARTH!

AND NONE OF *THEM* IS EVER LIKELY TO CAUSE AN *EXPLOSION* BIG ENOUGH TO SPLIT THE PLANET INTO *PIECES*.

THEN--WHAT *IS* GOING TO DO IT??

DOUBTLESS NOTHING IN MY *ARCHIVES ROOM*, WHICH CONTAINS *TAPES* ON ALL KNOWN PLANETS.

THEN, I'D BETTER *MOVE ON* TO--

GREAT KRYPTON! NOW WHAT?

BLIP! BLIP! BLIP!

THE *MONITORS* HERE--PICKING UP SOME SORT OF *DISTRESS SIGNAL*-- FROM *DEEP SPACE!*

THERE'S THE PROBLEM-- AN *ALIEN FREIGHTER* OF SOME KIND, ABOUT TO BE DEVOURED BY A *SIRIAN STAR-SUCKER!*

WITH ONLY *TWENTY MINUTES* LEFT, AND COUNTING, I DON'T *DARE* STREAK OFF TO SAVE IT-- AND *YET--!*

HEY NON! THERE'S MY IDEA OF A *BUDDY*-- EVEN IF HE DOESN'T *KNOW* IT!

GOOD OLD *GREEN LANTERN!* I KEEP FORGETTING THIS IS *HIS* SECTOR OF SPACE TO GUARD, AS WELL AS *MINE!*

I'M OFF THE HOOK!

YET, EVEN AS HE SPEAKS THE WORDS, THE MAN OF STEEL KNOWS HE *LIES*.

AND THAT '*INTERNAL CLOCK*' OF HIS GOES RIGHT ON *TICKING...!*

37

MEANWHILE, IN A CERTAIN *SUBTERRANEAN HIDE-OUT*, THOUSANDS OF MILES AWAY...

DOMINUS, DON'T YOU THINK MAYBE WE SHOULD *CHECK OUT* THAT SO-CALLED *MULTI-VERSAL TRANSPORTER* OF YOURS?--

--*YOU* KNOW, THE GIZMO THAT'S GONNA ZAP US TO *ANOTHER DIMENSION* A SPLIT-SECOND BEFORE THE EARTH GOES *BLOOEY*?

SURELY, ROGER, YOU'RE NOT STILL HARPING ON *THAT*!

AFTER ALL, AM *I* NOT IN THE SAME MORTAL PERIL AS *YOU*?

OH, *SURE*--*uh*, I MEAN--I *DON'T KNOW*, DOMINUS!

I MEAN--IN ALL THE MONTHS I'VE BEEN *ASSISTING* YOU--I'VE NEVER EVEN SEEN YOUR *FACE*!

Ah, *NOW* I SEE THE FETID *FEAR* THAT SPURS YOUR OUTBURST! *HA HA HA HA*

YOU THINK I MAY BE--A MERE *ROBOT*--

--AND THAT THE *REAL* DESTROYER OF THIS EARTH MAY BE LAUGHING UP HIS SLEEVE *ALREADY* IN ANOTHER DIMENSION!

REST ASSURED, ROGER--THIS FOOLPROOF *ESCAPE VEHICLE* OF MINE WILL DO ITS WORK--

--AS FLAW-LESSLY AS *I* HAVE DONE *MINE*!

WELL, *sir*, NOT *EXACTLY*--BUT I JUST THOUGHT MAYBE--I MEAN, IF I KNEW *WHO* I WAS WORKIN' FOR--!

THAT YOU SHALL KNOW *AFTER* THE CATACLYSM--

--AND NOT *BEFORE*!

38

AS...

NEXT STOP--LEVEL THREE!*

* THE UPPERMOST AND FINAL LEVEL OF THE FORTRESS OF SOLITUDE -- SUPERMAN'S *PRIVATE LIVING QUARTERS*-- WHICH WE'VE BEEN PROMISING TO SHOW YOU FOR *YEARS!* --*Len.*

EXCEPT FOR *LOIS*, *BATMAN*, AND *ROBIN*, NO ONE BORN ON EARTH HAS EVER *SEEN* THIS TOP LEVEL.

I SAVE IT FOR *RELAXATION* AND *RECREATION*--

--IN MOMENTS WHEN I CAN *AFFORD* TO RELAX WITH A GOOD GAME OF *HUNDRED-PINS!*

BLAMM

NO TIME TO WORK OUT WITH THIS *ATOMIC-POWERED AUTOMATON* I BUILT AS A *SPARRING PARTNER*, EITHER.

SOME-TIMES, IT JUST FEELS *GOOD* TO GO A ROUND OR TWO WITH IT--

RIGHT NOW, THOUGH, IT SURE ISN'T GIVING ME ANY *CLUES* AS TO HOW DOMINUS INTENDS TO ANNIHILATE THE EARTH IN... *UH... FIFTEEN MINUTES.*

THIS IS HARDLY THE TIME TO DABBLE IN *OILS* OR *WATERCOLORS*, EITHER.

BESIDES, PAINTING HAS NEVER BEEN MY *STRONG* SUIT. I'M *ADEQUATE*, BUT NOT PARTICULARLY *IMAGINATIVE*.

GOOD THING THERE ARE *COUNTLESS WORLDS* IN SPACE FOR ME TO PAINT, BEFORE I RUN OUT OF *INSPIRATION!*

I JUST HOPE *ONE* OF THOSE WORLDS...

...DOESN'T BECOME MY *NEW HOME!*

GOT TO GATHER MY THOUGHTS-- CLEAR THE COB-WEBS AWAY, SOMEHOW!

SO MANY WAYS THE WORLD COULD END-- SO LITTLE TIME FOR ME TO FIGURE OUT WHICH ONE IT'LL BE!

DIARY

Hmmm... MY DIARY!

MAYBE WRITING A SHORT ENTRY IN MY NATIVE KRYPTONESE LANGUAGE WILL CALM ME... LET ME THINK MORE CLEARLY.

DIARY

I USED TO ETCH THE WORDS INTO ITS METALLIC PAGES WITH MY BARE FINGERS...

...BUT NOW, I HAVE ONLY TO TOUCH THIS PLATE, AND IT TRANSCRIBES MY THOUGHTS...

...INCLUDING, BLAST IT, THE VERY ONES I JUST HAD!

GUESS I'M TOO AGITATED TO DO ANY WRITING NOW-- WHILE THE SECONDS TICK AWAY THE EARTH'S LAST QUARTER-HOUR!

WHAT'S WRONG WITH ME? WHY CAN'T I FIGURE OUT DOMINUS' MADDENING PUZZLE? WHY--?

WAIT A MINUTE! IF DOMINUS IS SOMEONE IN MY PAST, AS I SUSPECT--MAYBE A QUICK LOOK THROUGH MY DIARY WILL--

NO GO! I RE-READ IT COVER TO COVER IN LESS TIME THAN IT TOOK TO THINK OF DOING--

--BUT I'M AS MUCH IN THE DARK AS EVER!

I'M GETTING HYPER-TENSE... NOT THAT THAT SHOULD BE ANY SURPRISE TO ME, AT THIS POINT.

JUST ONE THING THAT MIGHT HELP ME PULL MY THOUGHTS TOGETHER...

40

...A FAST TROT THROUGH MY *FRIENDSHIP EXHIBITS*, TO REMIND ME OF THE PEOPLE WHOSE *LIVES* I'M TRYING TO SAVE:

THE VERY *SPECIAL* ONE I'VE BUILT TO HOUSE IMAGES OF *LOIS LANE*...

LOCK OF LOIS' HAIR

...NEXT, THE ONES DEDICATED TO *JIMMY OLSEN*, ACE REPORTER...

...AND TO *PERRY WHITE*, GREATEST EDITOR THE *DAILY PLANET* OR ANY OTHER NEWSPAPER EVER HAD!

I'VE EVEN ERECTED ONE SPOTLIGHTING *CLARK KENT*...

...JUST IN CASE I BRING SOMEBODY TO THIS LEVEL WHO *DOESN'T* KNOW MY SECRET IDENTITY.

CLARK KENT'S FAMOUS SCOOPS

HERE'S THE *SUPERGIRL* EXHIBIT.

OF COURSE, *SHE* MIGHT SURVIVE... THE SAME AS *I* MIGHT...

...AND SO MIGHT *WONDER WOMAN*, THOUGH I DOUBT IF SHE'D EVER DESERT HER FRIENDS AND FAMILY ON *PARADISE ISLAND*.

NEXT, THE EXHIBIT DEDICATED TO MY *FRIEND* AND MOST RESPECTED *COL-LEAGUE* AGAINST EVIL--

--THE *BATMAN*!

Hmmm...MAYBE TOMORROW I OUGHT TO BUILD AN EXHIBIT TO MY NEW FRIEND *CAPTAIN MARVEL*, AS WELL--

--IF THERE *IS* A TOMORROW!

41

I'VE GOT A TABLEAU DEPICTING MY *PARENTS*, AS WELL--

--BOTH *SETS* OF THEM--

--AND ONE OF *KRYPTO*, WHO WAS MY PET WHEN I WAS *SUPERBOY*.

THIS *SPECIAL GROUPING*--OF MY *COSTUMED FRIENDS*, NEXT TO THEIR *TRUE IDENTITIES*-- WAS ONCE SET TO *EXPLODE* IF THE FORTRESS WERE ENTERED BY UNAUTHORIZED PERSONS.

NOW, THOUGH, I'VE REDESIGNED IT SIMPLY--

--TO *VIBRATE* THE WHOLE THING INTO *HYPERSPACE* TILL THEY *LEAVE*.

THEN, A SOBERING REALIZATION:

IT--*DIDN'T WORK*! I'D HOPED TO *EASE* MY MIND--BY LOOKING AT THOSE IMAGES OF THE PEOPLE I LOVE--

--BUT SEEING THOSE EXHIBITS--- JUST MADE IT *WORSE*--

--JUST BROUGHT HOME TO ME HOW *MUCH* I'LL BE LOSING IF THE EARTH IS DESTROYED--

SLAM!

--EVEN IF I *SURVIVE*!

HEAR ME, DOMINUS-- IF YOU'RE *LISTENING* OUT THERE SOMEWHERE

WHY DON'T YOU COME OUT IN THE OPEN--AND FIGHT ME LIKE A MAN?

BUT THERE IS NO ANSWER.

SOMEHOW, SUPERMAN HADN'T REALLY THOUGHT THERE *WOULD* BE.

42

WELL, ROGER? HOW DO YOU LIKE IT?

I'LL MISS HIM--AT LEAST FOR A TIME--BUT I'M SURE I'LL FIND OTHER WAYS OF AMUSING MYSELF--

--PROBABLY BY CONQUERING THAT WORLD, OR ELSE DESTROYING IT, TOO!

uh--ARE YOU SURE SUPERMAN WON'T FIGURE OUT A WAY TO STOP THE EARTH FROM BLOWING?

OUR LITTLE HOME AWAY FROM HOLOCAUST, WHICH WILL TAKE US TO ANOTHER, ONLY SLIGHTLY LESSER EARTH--

POSITIVE, ROGER.

OH, HE COULD FIGURE IT OUT, I SUPPOSE--

IF HE LIGHTED ON JUST THE RIGHT CLUE, OUT OF SO MANY!

--WHERE THE MAN OF STEEL IS ONLY A CREATURE OF COMIC BOOKS, TV SHOWS, MOVIE SCREENS, AND VIDEO GAMES!

BUT HE WON'T--

--BECAUSE THAT CLUE IS "HIDDEN", SO TO SPEAK, IN THE BEST POSSIBLE PLACE!

AND, er-- WHERE'S THAT, DOMINUS?

WHY, RIGHT UNDER HIS NOSE, ROGER--RIGHT UNDER HIS VERY NOSE!

HAVEN'T YOU EVER READ EDGAR ALLAN POE'S "THE PURLOINED LETTER"?

Hmmm... ONLY TEN MINUTES LEFT!

IT WON'T BE LONG NOW..!

43

MEANWHILE, THOUSANDS OF MILES TO THE NORTH, A GRIM AND COLORFULLY-CLAD FIGURE STANDS BEFORE A HEAVILY-REINFORCED DOOR--A PORTAL NEVER CROSSED BY ANY MAN SAVE HIMSELF.

THEN, WITH A STRANGELY-RELUCTANT HAND, HE STEELS HIMSELF--AND ENTERS, TO GAZE FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MANY MONTHS UPON--

THE COSMIC ARK!

IT SHINES ALMOST LIKE A *STAR*--BUT IT WAS THE *EARTH* I WAS THINKING OF WHEN I BUILT IT, NOT LONG AGO.

STRANGE! AT THAT TIME, I HAD A *SCENARIO* ALL WORKED OUT IN MY MIND--A SCENARIO OF *WORLDWIDE DISASTER* WHICH MIGHT JUST BE COMING *TRUE!*

MY *SPACE-HOPPING* HAS TAUGHT ME JUST HOW *FRAGILE* THE LIFE OF THE EARTH IS--EVEN *WITHOUT* MAN'S OWN INHUMANITY TO MAN THROWN IN FOR GOOD MEASURE.

I *KNEW* THERE WAS ALWAYS THE POSSIBILITY THAT, ONE DAY, A *CATASTROPHE* WHICH EVEN *I* COULDN'T STAVE OFF MIGHT THREATEN THE PLANET...

...AND I WANTED TO BE *PREPARED* FOR IT.

I *LIVED* THE WHOLE THING IN MY *MIND*...

45

"...EVEN *ASSUMED*, HOPING AGAINST HOPE, I'D HAVE TIME TO REACH *LOIS*, *JIMMY*, AND *PERRY* BEFORE THE END CAME.

"WITH LUCK, *KARA* AND I MIGHT BE ABLE TO GATHER UP A *COUPLE OF DOZEN* PEOPLE--ALL THE SHIP WILL *HOLD*--

"--AND *ESCAPE* THE DOOMED EARTH'S GRAVITATIONAL PULL, BEFORE IT *EXPLODED*.

"--THE WORLD ENDING WITH A *BANG*, NOT A WHIMPER.

"FUNNY HOW IT'S ALWAYS AN *EXPLOSION* YOU THINK OF--

"NO NEED FOR *DISGUISES* OR *SECRET IDENTITIES* THERE--ONLY FOR *HARD WORK*--*COMPANSHIP*--AND *LOVE*.

"A SMALL *HANDFUL* OF HUMANITY WOULD SURVIVE, THEN--STRUGGLING TO BUILD NEW LIVES, A NEW CIVILIZATION ON ANOTHER *PLANET*, IN ANOTHER *STAR SYSTEM*.

"IT WOULD BE A *BRAVE* NEW WORLD, I KNOW... BUT IT WOULDN'T BE A VERY *HAPPY* ONE...

"...NOT FOR A *VERY* LONG TIME.

46

NOW, SUPERMAN ENTERS THE *FINAL* DOORWAY IN THIS ARCTIC CITADEL, TO FIND HIMSELF IN WHAT MAY BE, TO SOME, THE MOST *UNEXPECTED* CHAMBER OF ALL:

HIS *LIVING ROOM.*

I'VE NEVER BROUGHT *ANYONE* HERE IN ALL THE YEARS SINCE I BUILT THE FORTRESS OF SOLITUDE--NOT EVEN *LOIS* OR *BATMAN*...

AND NOW I MAY *NEVER* DO SO.

MY ATOMIC CLOCK SAYS--*12:55!* SINCE I DESTROYED THE *METEOR* AT PRECISELY *NOON*--

--THAT GIVES ME JUST *SEVEN MINUTES* TO THINK OF SOMETHING.

WELL, I'VE GONE OVER THE FORTRESS FROM *A* TO *Z*.

HERE'S WHERE EITHER I PUT IT ALL TOGETHER AND COME UP WITH THE *ANSWER*--OR--

THE WORDS HOVER, UNSPOKEN, IN THE AIR... TOO PAINFUL TO UTTER AGAIN.

AND, BECAUSE THERE IS *NOURISHMENT* OF MANY KINDS IN *SIMPLE ACTIONS*...

...HIS MIND-BOGGLING *COMPUTERS* ALMOST INSTANTLY MIX HIM...

...A *CHOCOLATE SHAKE!*

TO SOME, THE ACTION MAY APPEAR *FRIVOLOUS*...

...EVEN THAT OF A MAN DRIVEN *MAD* BY FOREKNOWLEDGE OF IMPENDING *CALAMITY*.

SUPERMAN KNOWS, HOWEVER, THAT HIS MIND CAN USE A FEW SECONDS OF *UNRAVELING*...

47

AND, AFTER ALL, WHEN ONE HAS *SUPER-SENSES*...

...EVEN *VIDEO-TAPES* CAN BE ALTERED TO UNREEL THEIR CONTENTS AT *FANTASTIC SPEED*...

...A SPEED SO GREAT THAT BOTH *SIGHT* AND *SOUND* WOULD BE UTTERLY *UNINTELLIGIBLE* TO ANY WATCHING EARTHLING...

...WHILE THE SON OF *JOR-EL* CAN WATCH LITERALLY *DOZENS* OF SUCH FILMS OR *TV* PROGRAMS AT *ONCE*.

HE'S SEEN THEM ALL *BEFORE*, OF COURSE... KNOWS THEIR WORDS AND IMAGES BY *HEART*.

BUT MERELY *REMEMBERING*... ISN'T *EVERYTHING*.

HE WONDERS... IS HE VIEWING THEM ALL FOR THE *LAST TIME*?

PRECIOUS MINUTES TICK BY, NOT AS UNNOTICED AS THEY APPEAR TO BE.

THEN, HE SCANS THE *BOOKS* WHICH LINE HIS SHELVES--HIS FEW HUNDRED *FAVORITES*, OUT OF ALL THE *UNTOLD THOUSANDS* HE HAS ACCESS TO.

KLIK!

WILL *THESE*, TOO, PASS FOREVER OUT OF *EXISTENCE*...

...EXACTLY *ONE MINUTE* HENCE?

12:59:17

12:59:17

NOTHING IS COMING TO MIND--

--NOTHING!

FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MY LIFE--I'M *PARALYZED!*

CAN'T EVEN BRING MYSELF TO USE MY *COSMIC ARK*--

--TO CHOOSE A *HANDFUL* TO SURVIVE, OUT OF EARTH'S *BILLIONS!*

THERE *MUST* BE A CLUE--AT LEAST A *STARTING POINT* THAT--

WAIT! MAYBE THAT'S THE *MISTAKE* I'VE BEEN MAKING ALL ALONG!

GOT TO THINK--*THINK!*

48

I'VE BEEN ASSUMING IT WOULD BE JUST *ONE* THING WHICH WOULD SOMEHOW DESTROY MY FORTRESS--AND THE *WORLD*.

AT THE *MOST*, I THOUGHT IT MIGHT BE *TWO* OR *THREE* THINGS--A VERY *LIMITED* CHAIN OF EVENTS--WHICH WOULD CAUSE THAT EARTH-DESTROYING *EXPLOSION*.

BUT--IT MIGHT *NOT* BE THAT WAY AT *ALL*!

LUTHOR

WHAT IF THE ANSWER REALLY INVOLVES *SEVERAL* OBJECTS WITHIN THE FORTRESS--OR *MANY* OF THEM--EVEN *MOST* OF THEM--

--SOME KIND OF *FREAK ACCIDENT* THAT WOULDN'T HAPPEN MORE THAN *ONCE IN A MILLION LIFETIMES*--BUT IS STILL A *REMOTE POSSIBILITY*--

--LIKE THE *LIGHTNING BOLT* THAT EVERY *ODDS-MAKER* IN THE UNIVERSE WOULD BET *WON'T* STRIKE YOU--BUT STILL *MIGHT*!

MAYBE SOME *COMBINATION* OF THINGS--OF *EVENTS*--IS ABOUT TO CAUSE THE *FINAL BLOW-UP* I SAW!

49

ONLY SECONDS LEFT--

--AND SO MANY POSSIBILITIES--SO MANY COMBINATIONS OF EVENTS!

LUCKILY, THIS PANEL WILL TURN MY THOUGHTS INTO IMAGES--JUST AS THE ONE NEAR MY DIARY TURNS THEM INTO WORDS.

I CAN EXAMINE ANY NUMBER OF COMPLICATED, CAUSE-AND-EFFECT CHAINS, AS FAST AS I CAN THINK OF THEM--

--AND THAT'S PRETTY FAST!

A TOUCH OF AN ANXIOUS HAND...

...AND A LARGER SCREEN DROPS DOWN TO COVER THE MANY SMALLER ONES.

NOW, SUPERMAN SEES AGAIN, IN HIS MIND'S-EYE WRIT LARGER, THAT SOUL-SEARING INSTANT WHEN HE SMASHED THE METEOR PULLED EARTHWARD BY THE ELECTRO-MAGNETIC POWER OF THE MYSTERIOUS DOMINUS...

THIS MUST BE WHERE IT ALL BEGAN! IT HAS TO BE!

IN A MATTER OF INSTANTS, COUNTLESS MORE IMAGINARY "SCENARIOS" FLASH UPON THE FAST-FLICKERING SCREEN.

THIS IS ONE OF THEM.

THERE I AM--STREAKING BACK TOWARD MY FORTRESS AFTERWARD.

BUT WHAT IF, WHEN I DESTROYED THE METEOR, I BECAME COATED WITH SOME ALIEN MICRO-ORGANISMS, OF A NEW AND UNKNOWN KIND--

--A TYPE WHICH, INSTEAD OF BEING KILLED BY MY BLOW-TORCH SHOWER--

"--WERE ACTIVATED BY IT INSTEAD!

"SURE! IF THAT HAPPENED, IT CREATES MANY NEW POSSI-BILITIES--

"--ONE OF WHICH IS THAT, AS I TOURED THE FORTRESS, THOSE MICRO-ORGANISMS HAD A DELAYED EFFECT ON MY DANCING PLANT, SAY--TURNING IT YELLOW--

"--THE COLOR FIERCELY HATED BY THE ALIEN BEAST IN THE CAGE NEXT TO IT.

"IF IT GOT ANGRY ENOUGH, THE CREATURE COULD BREAK FREE--

50

"--AND ATTACK, EVEN DEVOUR THE DANCING PLANT.

"THOSE MICRO-ORGANISMS WOULD NOW BE A PART OF THE BEAST, AND MAYBE--YES!

"1300 HOURS IS THE EXACT TIME WHEN MY ANTI-BACTERIAL GAS IS SCHEDULED TO BE AUTOMATICALLY RELEASED INTO THE AIR.

"IT CAN'T BE JUST A CO-INCIDENCE!

"THE GAS WOULD PROBABLY KILL EVEN MICRO-ORGANISMS THAT HAD SURVIVED THE BLOWTORCH SHOWER--AND SINCE THEY'VE NOW BECOME A PART OF THE BEAST--

"--THE RESULTING PAIN MIGHT DRIVE IT MAD!

"IT MIGHT SMASH ITS WAY OUT OF THE ZOO AREA, TO OTHER EXHIBITS--

"--INCLUDING THE WEAPONS AREA, FOR INSTANCE!

ZZZZZ

"THE ODDS ARE A MILLION OR MORE TO ONE AGAINST IT HAPPENING--BUT THE RIGHT ONE OF THOSE WEAPONS GOING OFF, MIGHT ACTIVATE THE OTHERS--

"--JUST AS ONE FIRECRACKER, TOSSED IN THE RIGHT SPOT, COULD SET OFF AN ENTIRE FIREWORKS STAND!

"YES, THAT COULD START A CHAIN REACTION THAT MIGHT DESTROY THE EARTH--

"--BUT WHAT WOULD STOP ME FROM FINDING SOME WAY TO DE-ACTIVATE THE WEAPONS IN TIME?

"MAYBE--IN ONE PROBABILITY-SEQUENCE--A WEAPONS BLAST COULD MELT THE SPECIAL GLASS THAT SHIELDS ME FROM MY KRYPTONITE SAMPLES--

"--ONE OR TWO OF WHICH ARE OF SUCH CONCENTRATED POWER--

"--THAT I'D BE UTTERLY HELPLESS IN A SPLIT SECOND--EVEN FROM SEVERAL HUNDRED FEET AWAY!

51

"AND WHILE I STRUGGLED TO RISE, THE VERY *EARTH* AROUND THE FORTRESS WOULD BEGIN TO *SHAKE*--POWERFULLY, *IRRESISTIBLY*--

"--WITH *REVERBERATIONS* STRONG ENOUGH TO SET EVERY BUILDING ON THE *PLANET* TREMBLING LIKE A LEAF IN A STRONG WIND.

RRRUMBLE!

"THAT STILL MIGHT NOT *DESTROY* THE EARTH--BUT--

"*ONE OR TWO* OF MY CONFISCATED SUPER-WEAPONS ARE DEFINITELY CAPABLE OF CAUSING *EXPLOSIONS* GREAT ENOUGH TO DO SO!

"ORDINARILY, NOT EVEN A *THERMONUCLEAR BOMB* COULD SET THEM OFF--

"--BUT JUST THE *'RIGHT'* COMBINATION OF BLASTS FROM A *MULTITUDE* OF *ALIEN WEAPONS* MIGHT DO IT!

"AND--I JUST THOUGHT OF SOMETHING *ELSE!*--

"IN MY *LAB*, THERE ARE VARIOUS MATERIALS WHICH, IF *COMBINED* SOMEHOW BY COSMIC CHANCE, MIGHT FORM A SUBSTANCE NEARLY *IDENTICAL* TO THE UNSTABLE COMPOUND THAT *DESTROYED KRYPTON!*

"IF THOSE TREMORS *DID* COMBINE THEM--IN A *BILLION-TO-ONE SHOT*--AND IF, SOMEHOW, THAT COMPOUND *MINGLED* WITH THE FORCES IN THE *DISINTEGRATION PIT* BELOW THE FORTRESS--

"--WHICH *ALREADY* CONTAINS SOME RADIOACTIVE KRYPTONIAN ELEMENTS--

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"--MY ONLY CHANCE FOR SURVIVAL WOULD BE MY ANTI-KRYPTONITE SHIT--

"--BY NOW, DOUBTLESS TURNED TO SLAG!

"THEN, EVEN IF I WERE STILL AWAKE, AND TRYING TO STOP THE COMING HOLOCAUST--

"--I'D BE TOO WEAK TO MAKE IT!

"I'D NEVER BE ABLE TO REACH THE WEAPONS ROOM FROM HERE --

"--BEFORE THE GROWING CHAIN EFFECT OF THE SUPER-WEAPONS COMBINED WITH THE TERRIBLE FORCES BREWING IN THE DISINTEGRATION PIT--

"--TO CREATE AN EXPLOSION POWERFUL ENOUGH BOTH TO KILL ME --

AMEN

"--AND TO *DESTROY* *THE FORTRESS!*

"NO *ONE* WEAPON--NO, NOT EVEN ANY *SEVERAL* OF THEM--COULD GENERATE ENOUGH SHEER, RAW, ATOM-DEVOURING *POWER* TO CRACK THE VERY *EARTH*, THE WAY I SAW IT FROM SPACE--

"BUT *DOZENS* OF THEM, ACTING *TOGETHER* ON THE WHIM OF SOME PERVERSE *FATE*--

54

"--YES, *THAT* MIGHT DO IT--

"--MIGHT CAUSE GREAT *FISSURES* TO APPEAR ON THE CRUST OF THE WORLD--

"--DOWN THE LENGTH AND BREADTH OF *ALL THE CONTINENTS*--

"--CUTTING A JAGGED, DEADLY *SWATH* FROM THE ARCTIC --

"--WHILE A *DEADLY GREEN CLOUD* HOVERED OVER ALL, LIKE THE BREATH OF THE *GRIM REAPER!*

55

"AND WHERE, ONLY MOMENTS BEFORE, GREAT *SKY-SCRAPERS* HAD TOPPLED LIKE CHILDREN'S *SAND-CASTLES*--

"--WHILE ALL THE EARTH'S MULTITUDES HAD *TREMBLED* LIKE *ANTS* IN THE HAND OF A *VENGEFUL GOLIATH*--

RRRRUM

56

"--NOW, EVEN THAT CATASTROPHE WOULD BE FORGOTTEN IN A SINGLE, MIND-OBLITERATING INSTANT--
RLE
LOAN
TWA
FLT
57

"--SINCE NO ONE ON EARTH WOULD BE ALIVE TO REMEMBER IT!

" IN FACT-- THERE WOULD BE NO EARTH!

"NOR WOULD THERE BE ANY *SOUND*--NOT ONLY IN THE NEAR-VACUUM OF *SPACE*, BUT EVEN IN THE REMNANTS OF THE PLANET'S FAST— DISSIPATING *ATMOSPHERE*--

"FOR, HOW CAN EVEN THE MOST *DEVASTATING* EXPLOSION DEAFEN *EARS*-- WHICH NO LONGER *EXIST*?"

59

THAT'S *ONE* WAY THE DISASTER COULD STRIKE AT PRECISELY *ONE P.M.*-- BUT IT'S NOT THE *ONLY* WAY! THERE ARE *COUNTLESS* COMBINATIONS OF EVENTS--AND I *KNOW* IT!

I'VE GOT TO FIND THE *WEAK LINK* IN ALL THE *SIMILAR* COMBINATIONS--BREAK *IT*-- AND PRAY I'VE FOUND THE *RIGHT* ONE!

IT'S TOO LATE TO DEAL WITH THE *MICRO-ORGANISMS*... AND I CAN'T BE SURE ABOUT THE *DANCING PLANT!*

12:59:52

12:59:53

12:59:54

ALL RIGHT, ROGER! CLIMB *ABOARD!*

WITHIN *SECONDS*, THE *CHAIN REACTION* I SET UP WILL BEGIN-- AND THE WORLD IS *IRREVERSIBLY DOOMED!*

BUT THERE'S *ONE* LINK THAT OCCURS IN ALL THE *SIMILAR* SCENARIOS--

--IF ONLY I CAN *REACH* IT--IN *TIME!*

12:59:55

12:59:56

12:59:57

WE BETTER REV UP THE *MOTOR* THEN, HUH, DOMINUS?

I DON'T *NEED* TO ACTIVATE THE MOTOR! THAT'S THE *BEAUTY* OF IT!

IT'S DESIGNED TO BE ACTIVATED BY THE GREAT *EARTH TREMORS* WHICH WILL PRECEDE THE FINAL *EXPLOSION!*

THE *ANTI-BACTERIAL GAS!*

THERE! PLUGGED THE *NOZZLES*-- SO THEY *CAN'T* RELEASE THEIR CONTENTS AT *H-HOUR!*

12:59:58

12:59:59

1:00:00

--SO ALL WE MUST DO IS *WAIT*, FOR THE PROPER VIBRATIONS TO OCCUR, BY MY CALCULATIONS, AT PRECISELY *1:04:47*...

...EARTH'S *TOTAL DESTRUCTION* AT *1:05:28!*

Y-YOU REALLY GOT IT *TIMED*, DON'T YOU, BOSS?

→ 1:00:01 → 1:00:02 → 1:00:03 → 1:00:04 → 1:00:05 → 1:00:06 → 1:00:07 → 1:00:08

NOTHING TO DO NOW-- BUT *WAIT!*

MY *X-RAY VISION* SHOWS THAT *ALIEN BEAST* GOBBLING DOWN MY *DANCING PLANT* ALREADY--SO I JUST HOPE I'VE REMOVED THE *RIGHT* PIECE TO PREVENT A *DOMINO EFFECT!*

MOMENTS PASS...

...AND EVEN *SUPERMAN* DOESN'T NOTICE JUST HOW WEAK HIS *KNEES* HAVE BECOME.

BUT AT LAST... HE THROWS BACK HIS HEAD...

...AND *LAUGHS!*

60

DOMINUS, HOWEVER, DOES NOT.

IT'S 1:06--AND STILL NO TREMORS, NO EXPLOSION--NOTHING!

WHAT COULD HAVE GONE WRONG? WHAT??

YOU'LL HAVE PLENTY OF TIME TO WORK ON THOSE CALCULATIONS IN PRISON, DOMINUS!

TH-THAT VOICE! IT CAN'T BE--!

SUPERMAN!

YOU'VE JUST PASSED YOUR EYE TEST, DOMINUS...

...AND NOW WE'LL FIND OUT JUST WHO YOU ARE, IN JUST A MINUTE...

...NOT THAT I'M NOT STARTING TO GET A FEW IDEAS ALONG THAT LINE...

WELL? ARE YOU COMING OUT--OR DO I PLAY CAN-OPENER?

ROGER--IT SEEMS YOU MUST PRESS THE START-SWITCH, AFTER ALL!

UH--YESSIR!

IGNITE

NEXT MOMENT, POWERFUL ENGINES ROAR INTO ACTION--

VROOOOM!

--BUT SO DO POWERFUL HANDS--

AND FRANKLY... THERE'S REALLY NO CONTEST.

61

BUT, BECAUSE **WOULD-BE WORLD-DESTROYERS** ARE A NOTABLY **STUBBORN** LOT--

--WHICH IS NOT LONG IN COMING!

KRASH!

NO! NNOOO! AND I WAS SO **CERTAIN** OF VICTORY--

--I'M NOT EVEN ARMED WITH MY **KRYPTONITE-RAY PISTOL!**

SOMEHOW, I **DON'T** TAKE THAT TO MEAN YOU'RE **SURRENDERING?**

WHAT DO **YOU** THINK?

--**THIS** SCENARIO, UNLIKE THE ONE INVOLVING EARTH'S DESTRUCTION MUST BE PLAYED OUT TO THE **BITTER END**--

THERE ARE **OTHER** FORCES WHICH WILL STOP YOU, **SURELY**--

UHHHNN--!

--SUCH AS THIS **ATOMIC HANDGUN**, WITH WHICH I MEANT TO CONQUER AN **ALTERNATE** EARTH!

62

AH! I THOUGHT THE RAYS IT SHOOTS--SO SIMILAR TO KRYPTONITE IN MANY WAYS--WOULD STOP YOU.

IT WOULD TAKE--SEVERAL MINUTES OF THOSE RAYS--TO KILL ME!

WELL, THANKS TO YOU, I'M NOT GOING ANY-WHERE--

--SO I'VE GOT ALL THE TIME IN THIS WORLD!

WRONG, MASKED MAN! TIME IS EXACTLY WHAT YOU DON'T HAVE! MAYBE YOU CAN HURT ME--

--STOP MY BODY FROM REACHING YOU--

--BUT WHAT ABOUT--SONIC WAVES?

AND NOW, SUPERMAN SHOUTS--

--LOUDER--

--LOUDER--

--AND LOUDER STILL--UNTIL--

EZOOT!

HEAR THAT, DOMINUS?

IT'S THE SOUND OF YOUR LITTLE HOUSE OF CARDS, TUMBLING DOWN AROUND YOUR HELMETED HEAD!

AND HERE COMES THE NEXT NUMBER ON MY OWN PERSONAL HIT PARADE--!

THERE ARE NO LETTERS IN THE ENGLISH ALPHABET TO ADEQUATELY SUGGEST THE SOUND WHICH NOW ERUPTS FROM SUPERMAN'S STAR-BORN THROAT.

SUFFICE IT TO SAY--IT DELIVERS THE GOODS!

63

NOW, JUST IN CASE YOU'VE GOT ANY **FURTHER** TRICKS UP THOSE ARMORED SLEEVES--

C-CURSE YOU-- SUPERMAN--!

--WE'LL JUST TIE THEM UP WITH A NICE **STEEL RIBBON.**

AND I'LL BE **MIGHTY** SURPRISED IF, BEHIND THAT METAL MASK, I DON'T FIND--

--LUTHOR!

YEP!

ONLY **YOU** COULD BE BOTH SO **BRILLIANT**-- AND SO **EVIL!**

DO YOU REALLY **HATE** ME SO MUCH, LUTHOR--THAT YOU'D HAVE **DESTROYED THE WORLD** TO BE RID OF ME?

CAN YOU **DOUBT** IT?

WHEN I WAS THERE,* I **MEMORIZED** EVERY LAST **INCH** OF YOUR FORTRESS OF SOLITUDE.

*ACTION #407. --Len

LATER, IT WAS LARGELY A MATTER OF FIGURING THE **PROBABILITIES.**

I WORKED **HERE**--DIRECTLY **UNDER** THE PRISON--WHILE A **HOLOGRAPHIC IMAGE** TOOK MY PLACE IN THE CELL FOR HOURS AT A TIME--THE PERFECT **COVER.**

AH, **ROGER!** I SEE YOU'VE FOUND MY **KRYPTONITE-RAY GUN** AMONG THE RUINS!

KILL THIS PIG--**NOW!**

YOUR **ASSISTANT!?** I WAS SO BUSY--HE WAS THE **ONE** ELEMENT I OVERLOOKED!

WELL, ROGER? WHAT'LL IT **BE?**

SUPERMAN...

...**TAKE** THE GUN... **PLEASE!**

I MUST'VE BEEN **INSANE** TO FOLLOW DOMINUS-- **LUTHOR**--THIS LONG.

THIS IS **MY** WORLD AS MUCH AS **ANYBODY'S**--

--AND I'D RATHER SERVE **TIME** HERE THAN RUN OFF TO A **NEW** ONE!

AFTER THE **MENACE** WAS ENDED, I COULD SWIFTLY RETURN TO **SPACE**, AND FIGURE OUT WHAT **KIND** OF RAYS--FROM WHAT **POINT** ON EARTH--COULD'VE PULLED THAT METEOR HERE IN THE FIRST PLACE!

THEN, I'VE JUST ONE LAST QUESTION, SUPERMAN. HOW DID YOU **FIND** MY SECRET LAB?

THE TRAIL OF **ELECTRON-MEMORY**, AS THEY CALL IT, LED ME STRAIGHT **HERE**... BENEATH THE STATE PRISON!

YOU MAKE IT SOUND-- SO **EASY** TO DEFEAT ME!

IT WASN'T REALLY ALL THAT **HARD,** LUTHOR...

...ONCE I HAD THE **TIME...!**

--FINIS--

64

WE DON'T REST ON OUR LAURELS!

FOR OVER FOUR DECADES, WE'VE BEEN BRINGING YOU THE VERY BEST IN COMICS' *EXCITEMENT*-- AND, FRIEND, THAT'S JUST THE **BEGINNING!**

AND COMING THIS FALL: **BATMAN VS. THE HULK!** --A SPECTACULAR EVENT! *DON'T MISS IT!!*

THE NEW DC

WHERE THE *ACTION* KEEPS ON COMING!

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